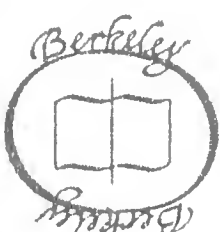
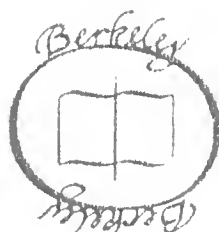
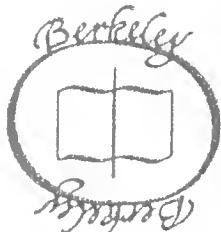
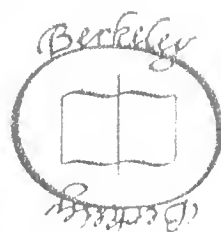
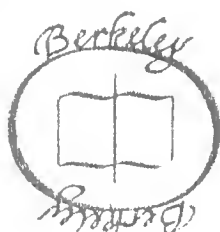
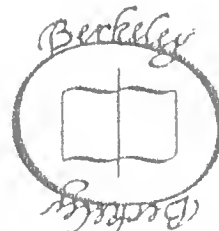
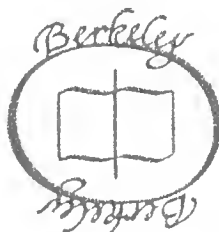
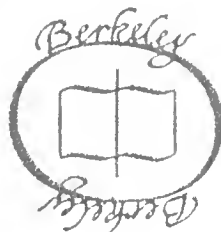
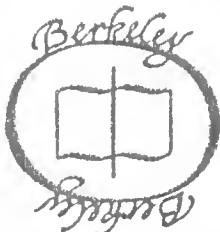
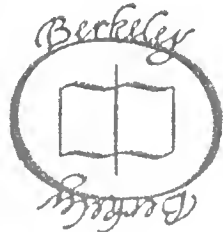


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Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

Warren Winiarski

CREATING CLASSIC WINES IN THE NAPA VALLEY

Interviews Conducted by
Ruth Teiser
in 1991 and 1993



Warren and Barbara Winiarski evaluating Stag's Leap wines at their home on the Silverado Trail, about 1974.

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Warren Winiarski dated May 12, 1994. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

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Interviewed in 1991 and 1993 by Ruth Teiser for the Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated by Ruth Teiser in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstituted as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed has been made by a committee consisting of the director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; the current chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; Ruth Teiser, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

Until her death in June 1994, Ruth Teiser was project originator, initiator, director, and conductor of the greater part of the oral histories. Her book, Winemaking in California, co-authored with Catherine Harroun and published in 1982, was the product of more than forty years of research, interviewing, and photographing. (Those wine history files are now in The Bancroft Library for researcher use.) Ruth Teiser's expertise and knowledge of the wine industry contributed significantly to the documenting of its history in this series.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of wine men. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial winemaking did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his or her own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State

Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of materials readily available for the purpose.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

Carole Hicke
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Winemen
Oral History Series

July 1994
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

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- Maynard A. Amerine, The University of California and the State's Wine Industry, 1971
- Maynard A. Amerine, Wine Bibliographies and Taste Perception Studies, 1988
- Philo Biane, Wine Making in Southern California and Recollections of Fruit Industries, Inc., 1972
- Charles A. Carpy, Viticulture and Enology at Freemark Abbey, 1994
- John B. Cella, The Cella Family in the California Wine Industry, 1986
- Charles Crawford, Recollections of a Career with the Gallo Winery and the Development of the California Wine Industry, 1942-1989, 1990
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- William V. Cruess, A Half Century of Food and Wine Technology, 1967
- Jack and Jamie Peterman Davies, Rebuilding Schramsberg: The Creation of a California Champagne House, 1990
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- Louis Gomberg, Analytical Perspectives on the California Wine Industry, 1935-1990, 1990
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- Joseph E. Heitz, Creating a Winery in the Napa Valley, 1986
- Maynard A. Joslyn, A Technologist Views the California Wine Industry, 1974
- Amandus N. Kasimatis, A Career in California Viticulture, 1988

- Morris Katz, Paul Masson Winery Operations and Management, 1944-1988, 1990
- Lekh F. Knowles, Jr., Beaulieu Vineyards from Family to Corporate Ownership, 1990
- Horace O. Lanza and Harry Baccigaluppi, California Grape Products and Other Wine Enterprises, 1971
- Zelma R. Long, The Past is the Beginning of the Future: Simi Winery in its Second Century, 1992
- Richard Maher, California Winery Management and Marketing, 1992
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- Eleanor McCrea, Stony Hill Vineyards: The Creation of a Napa Valley Estate Winery, 1990
- Otto E. Meyer, California Premium Wines and Brandy, 1973
- Norbert C. Mirassou and Edmund A. Mirassou, The Evolution of a Santa Clara Valley Winery, 1986
- Peter Mondavi, Advances in Technology and Production at Charles Krug Winery, 1946-1988, 1990
- Robert Mondavi, Creativity in the Wine Industry, 1985
- Michael Moone, Management and Marketing at Beringer Vineyards and Wine World, Inc., 1990
- Myron S. Nightingale, Making Wine in California, 1944-1987, 1988
- Harold P. Olmo, Plant Genetics and New Grape Varieties, 1976
- Cornelius Ough, Researches of an Enologist. University of California, Davis, 1950-1990, 1990
- John A. Parducci, Six Decades of Making Wine in Mendocino County, California, 1992
- Antonio Perelli-Minetti, A Life in Wine Making, 1975
- Louis A. Petri, The Petri Family in the Wine Industry, 1971
- Jefferson E. Peyser, The Law and the California Wine Industry, 1974
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- Edmund A. Rossi, Italian Swiss Colony and the Wine Industry, 1971
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- Arpaxat Setrakian, A. Setrakian, a Leader of the San Joaquin Valley Grape Industry, 1977
- Elie Skofis, California Wine and Brandy Maker, 1988
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- Louis (Bob) Trincherio, California Zinfandels, a Success Story, 1992
- Charles F. Wagner and Charles J. Wagner, Caymus Vineyards: A Father-Son Team Producing Distinctive Wines, 1994
- The Wente Family and the California Wine Industry, interviews with Jean, Carolyn, Philip, and Eric Wente, 1992
- Ernest A. Wente, Wine Making in the Livermore Valley, 1971
- Warren Winiarski, Creating Classic Wines in the Napa Valley, 1994
- Albert J. Winkler, Viticultural Research at UC Davis (1921-1971), 1973
- John H. Wright, Domaine Chandon: The First French-owned California Sparkling Wine Cellar, includes an interview with Edmond Maudière, 1992

INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Ruth Teiser

Warren Winiarski won international fame at the 1976 Paris Tasting for his Stag's Leap wine. This was only four years after he started his winery. His adherence to high quality standards for his wines has continued to this day.

Warren Winiarski was born on October 22, 1928 in Chicago, Illinois, and spent his early years there. His Polish-American family was part of a cohesive and somewhat isolated community of people of similar heritage. He attended the public schools without achieving the kind of academic excellence that would have been anticipated in a boy who went on for a time to an academic career. As he explained, however, he was a difficult student because he did not easily accept what he was taught but "had to reduce things for my own illumination."

The same kind of turn of mind affected this interview. Always courteous and affable, he steered the interview in his own direction, although he generally followed the outline of suggested subjects sent to him in advance. He, however, terminated the interview rather abruptly, leaving the interviewer with some inquiries not made.

Thus this interview is remarkably characteristic of the narrator. Evident are his intelligence, his interest in philosophy and abstract ideas, and his broad concept of world wine. And his determination.

As he recounts, his interest in wine and an independent agrarian life for himself and his wife led him from an academic career into the wine industry. At first he worked for others, and finally in the early 1970s he created Stag's Leap vineyard and winery. His training in viticulture and enology was largely on-the-job and through independent study, and thus he developed the high ideals that have characterized his winemaking and brought it success and acclaim.

The first interview sessions were held on July 24 and 25, 1991, at the winery and in a sitting room of his attractive home north of Napa and above the Silverado Trail. The final session, delayed until March 24, 1993, because of scheduling problems, was held in his office in the Stag's Leap hillside winery. The tapings were several times interrupted for winery matters.

Mr. Winiarski reviewed the transcripts twice at his request, the second time reviewing his own editorial changes. He then made additional small changes and revisions, but no substantive alterations.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer/Editor

April 1994
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Warren Winiarski

Date of birth October 22, 1928 Birthplace Chicago, IL

Father's full name Stephen Winiarski

Occupation Businessman Birthplace Chicago, IL

Mother's full name Lottie Winiarski

Occupation Homemaker Birthplace Chicago, IL

Your spouse Barbara

Your children Kasia, Stephen, and Julia

Where did you grow up? Chicago, IL

Present community Napa, CA

Education Chicago Public Schools, St. John's College, University of Chicago,
University of Florence, Italy, Croce Institute, Naples, Italy

Occupation(s) Winemaker

Areas of expertise Wine growing and making

Other interests or activities Political Theory, Education, and Horticulture

Organizations in which you are active Board of Directors St. John's College,
Burpee Seed Company, Napa Valley Vintners Association, and DARE (Napa).

I EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION (1928-1964)

[Interview 1: July 24, 1991]##¹

Teiser: We generally begin at the beginning--when and where you were born.

Winiarski: Nineteen twenty-eight, October 22, in Chicago. It was at the beginning of the Depression; it was a good harbinger for future things. Sometime around then, in the fall of 1928, wasn't there that stock market unpleasantness? I don't know how that reflects on the current situation, but that's the year I was born.

Teiser: I guess people who were born during the Depression have some little remnants, perhaps more psychological than not. Was your family hit by the Depression?

Winiarski: Not that I recall. I don't think there's anything that I can put in a recollection.

You know, my name, Winiarski, means "son of a winemaker." The "-ski" part is genitive, so it refers to origin, like Peterson is the son of Peter; so Winiarski is the son of someone who makes wine, and my father was a winemaker; he made dandelion wine and fruit wine as a hobby.

Teiser: What was his occupation?

Winiarski: He ran a livery business for weddings, funerals, and that sort of thing, a business that his father started long before that. The family was in this county about a hundred years or more.

Teiser: Were you involved in his winemaking?

¹This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or segment of tape has begun. For a guide to the tapes, see page following transcript.

Winiarski: I remember putting my ear to the barrels and hearing the sounds of the fermentation. He used that wine on social occasions, since he did this sort of community service. This was a small community within a large city. Everyone spoke Polish, and some folks only spoke Polish. When he conducted these social events and ceremonies, he would use some of his wine. That was something very special, and I do remember that. I remember in the cool cellar of our home where I was raised that there were these barrels from time to time. I don't have any recollection of the process, but I do remember listening to the fermentation, and I do remember tasting the wine that he made on some of these occasions. It was always very palatable and pleasant.

He made honey wine also--mead. So he made fruit wines, flavored wines, and mead.

Teiser: I've never tasted mead.

Winiarski: I tried to make that early, too. I tried to go through the footsteps that he had, and it's not very interesting. You can leave a little sugar in it so it's mild and pleasant. I have no recollection of that wine that he made.

Teiser: It was made under quite primitive conditions originally, wasn't it?

Winiarski: Yes. You have to dilute the honey down before you begin the fermentation. Otherwise it just doesn't ferment. You have to get to a degree of brix (about 22⁰) that is suitable for fermentation, and that's the way one starts.

Teiser: What was your early schooling before college?

Winiarski: It was actually in this same neighborhood. I attended public school, but I also attended private school, which was to learn Polish. That was in this little community that was so insulated that we hardly knew what else was going on. I'm sure some people did, but it was quite possible in this community--you knew everyone, or you knew someone who knew someone else. There was a closeness, a sense of cohesiveness, and a sense of real community, where there was a butcher, a baker, a candlestick-maker. They were all on different corners or in different parts, and you walked here and there around this community to get what you needed.

Part of it was a public school within that community, Casimir Pulaski School, the name obviously chosen for its relevance to that community; it was a public school, but it had

the name of a Polish hero who was also a part of our revolutionary war. He made contributions to the revolutionary effort by his strategies and fortifications, as well as by being a leader in the various battle campaigns.

Teiser: When you went to college, then, you got out among other people more than you had when you were young?

Winiarski: Well, that happened when I went to high school. Then you go into a larger community. That was a public high school, actually a technical school, in Chicago.

Teiser: Your later academic career was more academic, not technical, wasn't it?

Winiarski: It was humanities mainly.

Teiser: Were you a good student? You must have been.

Winiarski: I think so, but difficult. I think I always had to see it my way; I had to reduce things for my own illumination into terms that I could understand. That was tough in the early days in the public school. I remember being in trouble a lot in school and sort of failing once and not advancing in the class for reasons of science and other things where I couldn't quite accomplish the transformation of the material for my own purposes. They didn't think too highly of that endeavor, and I stayed behind a year or a half year; it was 7A or 7B. That was a shattering experience; that I can recall.

But still, I had to do that; I had to change things around until I understood it in the way I could deal with it.

Teiser: Does that apply to the way you make wine?

Winiarski: It might. That's a very good point, actually. I think I had to do that.

Teiser: How did you happen to decide to go on to do graduate work and get an M.A. after college?

Winiarski: After high school I attended the University of Chicago for a while, and then I attended a school of agriculture and mining at Fort Collins, Colorado. I thought I might be interested in forestry. That lasted only a short time, I think--maybe a couple of semesters--because I found that it really wasn't what I thought it was. I found myself more interested in understanding things and more interested in the humanities than in the technical proficiencies.

The Idea of a Sense of Community

Winiarski: I don't think we should abandon that early inspiration of the wine. I think maybe there's something more there in those early days. My grandfather, as I've heard, originally delivered coal in the winter and ice in the summer for businesses, households, and that sort of thing. Gradually that changed itself from delivery to livery; they simply provided horse and buggy and whatever other kind of carriages were appropriate, mainly in this neighborhood. Later that was expanded, but in the beginning I think the sense of neighborhood, the sense of community was very important; and now that I think of it, that may have contributed to the unwillingness to become simply technically proficient at a skill, for example, like forestry. Or I didn't want to be just technically competent, but I wanted some larger sense of community. [This was due,] I think, to having had an experience of that in this small community where everyone had a job, where there was such a cohesive community, and where people felt about each other in certain ways and felt about the outside in other ways--that's part of it unfortunately, but that's a sense of community, and that means a closed community. The intimacy and the coherence of that kind of life I think made a pretty big impression on me.

My father contributed to that. Gradually that business became narrowed down to concentrating on weddings, confirmations, and funerals, and I think after a while even more concentrated on funerals and that aspect of it. But that was a very important part of that community, a crucial contribution to the community. We lived across from the Polish National Catholic Cathedral, so we were right in the center of things.

Teiser: Did you find any sense of community in the colleges and the universities you went to?

Winiarski: I think that's why I was drawn to the liberal arts, because that's an idea which is not particularly articulated in modern times. It belongs to an earlier time when people thought about social and political communities in different ways--about their limitations and about what guided the limitations. That's not a modern idea. I mean, the idea of growth and the idea of endless expansion is part of modern outlook, and not part of the outlook that I had a taste of when I attended some college courses at the University of Chicago.

There another outlook opened up, and then I went away from that. That's when I went to Colorado, but it was very quickly clear to me that it wasn't going to work. Someone gave me a book about St. John's College in Annapolis, and that seemed to satisfy all those--they weren't interested specifically in technical proficiency. They wanted you to understand those things, but the most important thing was the understanding itself--not to be competent in a technical way, but to understand, and that's just what I was looking for. That might have gone back to this old thing about having to redo things that your teachers tell you in a way that you can grasp and having come to it in some terms, making it your own.

You are very good, because you are drawing all this out. These are connections I had not made before, but they are obviously very important.

Academic Years

Teiser: Did you get your B.A. from the University of Chicago?

Winiarski: No, I got my B.A. at St. John's College. At that time the [Robert M.] Hutchins program, which you are familiar with, I'm sure, was only in a remnant form at the University of Chicago.

Teiser: You mean it was past its prime?

Winiarski: I think many people would say it was past its prime. Hutchins had already left, and what was there was already somewhat diluted from his original intention. Where it did exist in its original form, and perhaps even more than Hutchins himself envisaged, was at St. John's College in Annapolis. There it was not only practiced as a curriculum consideration, but it was also practiced as a small community. There were four hundred students at that time or maybe even less--three hundred students. It had a very definite size; that college wanted to be small to provide a community of learning where people were able to communicate about the same kinds of things and engaged with each other in elucidating the subject matter of those books.

Teiser: You then went on to get your M.A.?

Winiarski: Yes. I left St. John's and went back to the University of Chicago for studies in political science. I think I was there two years. Again, this was trying to articulate this other



Warren Winiarski at St. John's College, 1953.

idea of the political history, which goes back to the need to study those original texts which spoke of that earlier tradition of thought--about small communities, about cohesive communities, and about principles of political life which are different from those which are current. That was very interesting to me.

Teiser: Did you become a teaching assistant then?

Winiarski: No, I went to Italy then and studied at Croce Institute in Naples and at the University of Florence, again studying some of the things that I had begun at the University of Chicago--Machiavelli in particular, Francesco Guicciardini, and the theorists of the Italian tradition. That was about fifteen months or so at the University of Florence, and I worked with the Machiavelli manuscripts at the Laurentian Library.

I wanted to get to Germany. In Erfurt there was one of the most important manuscripts of *Il Principe*, but I didn't get any response from the Communist authorities.

Teiser: Were you intending at that time to get a Ph.D. and go into teaching?

Winiarski: I think so. As far as I understood my own purposes, that was it.

Teiser: Then when you came back you became a--

Winiarski: I became a lecturer in the Basic Program at the University College. This was sort of a program of non-graduate studies--people who had taken or not taken a degree. It was a four-year, all-required program in part for people who had already some academic training or who had an interest but no specific academic training. It led to a certificate. This was one of the last parts of the Hutchins program, and it existed then at the University College. Not the College of the University; there's a big difference. University College is sort of extension, and that's where the program existed in its fullest form.

Teiser: How long did you do that?

Winiarski: I think I did that for about six years while taking further graduate courses and working toward a Ph.D. In the meantime I got the M.A., and at a certain point I guess this idea of cohesive community and life that Barbara and I and our family then could live and practice together became the most important

consideration. It eventually became more important than finishing the Ph.D. work.

Teiser: That's hard to break off after you've put that much effort into it, isn't it?

Winiarski: It was. And there were satisfactions in teaching that would be difficult if not impossible to duplicate. It was tough to make that decision.

II WORKING IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

Beginning of Interest in Winemaking as a Profession

Winiarski: Going back a little bit, sort of filling in the spaces, when I was at St. John's I met Philip Wagner. You know, Phil still thinks about these things. Maynard [Amerine] and Phil both had a large hand in getting me started. It was Philip to whom I wrote to ask about the opportunities, and he in turn wrote to Maynard. Maynard said, "It's practically impossible to get started these days the way you want to do it, with no formal training." Phil sent that letter to me a long time after we had achieved a certain amount of success in this endeavor.

Teiser: What made you interested in wine as an occupation? Or were you thinking of it as an occupation?

Winiarski: I was, and I got encouragement from both Phil and Maynard in this. Although he didn't underestimate the difficulties, he did think it would be possible. Phil encouraged me more into regional wines, which is a very strong interest of his. He encouraged me to become interested in regional wines and the development of the hybrids and use of hybrids to establish wines of regional significance. That was very attractive for a long time; I was thinking about this.

I was playing with these ideas while I was at St. John's. Later, while attending the University of Chicago, I even made wines from grapes that one of Philip's growers produced in Westminster County, Maryland, one year. While on a visit to Barbara's parents' home in Baltimore, I drove up there and bought a big crock at one of those antique stores along the road. This is sort of amusing. I got this antique crock, and I got the grapes. I crushed the grapes in Baltimore and took them back to Chicago to finish the fermentation. This was a graduate school exercise. Have you ever seen these old antique crocks?

Teiser: I think I have. Are they like what they make pickles in?

Winiarski: Right, exactly, and they were used to make wine, too. But it is a different microbiology. I didn't realize that those tiny hairline cracks concealed a world of life that was soon to make a very important impression on the wine that I made.
[laughter] When you get one of these antique crocks, you can't tell what it was used for before. This one probably belonged to someone who made cabbage or pickles in the back country of Maryland.

Teiser: How did your wine turn out?

Winiarski: It turned out all right for a while. Afterwards that stronger, hidden force in all those little cracks reasserted itself, and that wine turned to something that was not very pleasant. That was my first winemaking venture.

Teiser: At least you got all through the process.

Winiarski: I got through the process, yes, and it was pretty good--for a while.

Teiser: Did you continue, then, making wine?

Winiarski: That simmered.

I have to tell you something else that happened. This is another flashback (see how well you are doing your job?). In 1954 or 1955, after two years at the university in political science, I went to Italy, as I said, and began to use wine on a regular basis with meals. That was really fine; I liked that whole idea. In our family wine was a special occasion event and not daily, but in Italy I found wine used on a daily basis. It was a little bit with lunch in the wonderful Italian sunshine. I mean, it really made a difference in how you perceived food and how your afternoon was fulfilled.

Teiser: Did you take any criteria from the United States about what wine should taste like?

Winiarski: No. By that time my father had stopped making the wine, and we used it only occasionally, so I didn't fasten in on the whole topic and presentation of wine. It's been my experience that everyone who is engaged with wine in a more than casual way has some experience in which wine reveals itself for the first time, no matter how many times you've had it before and under what circumstances. There is one single moment when the richness and the significance of it come to be.

I went to Italy and used wine and so on, and I came back and spent a number of years again at the University of Chicago. It wasn't until a friend visited Barbara and me and brought a wine from the East Coast. It was in the class of one of Philip Wagner's hybrid wines, and at that luncheon wine took on its special significance for me. It was epiphanal! It illuminated itself in a way it had never appeared before. From that time onward I started to read about it, I became interested in it and talked to people about it. I would visit stores and chat with people who were selling the wine who were familiar with the origins of this or that wine and the status of them, the characters, the virtues of them. It became a preoccupation.

This was toward the end of those six or so years at the University of Chicago when the whole idea of finding a kind of life that we could share as a family, participate in as a family, began to emerge.

##

Winiarski: The two ideas began to converge; something we could do together, and the interest in wine and the fascination with all its aspects began to come together.

Teiser: Did your wife feel the same interest?

Winiarski: Yes. Not from the same origins. Partly it was because I was interested in it. These threads were not coming together identically for her as they were for me.

Teiser: Did either of you have any idea of agrarian life?

Winiarski: I think we wanted to be out of the city if possible. We perceived it would be difficult to accomplish what we wanted to do in an urban context. It wasn't going to be simply a business, in other words. It had to be a special kind of activity where we could share with each other the things we were doing. I think that was clear.

Explorations

Winiarski: I even went to New Mexico to see what kind of [opportunities were there]. We didn't have the resources to go out and buy something and live from that, so whatever it was going to be, it would have to be something that we would have to work through and hopefully eventually develop the resources to be

able to sustain ourselves. In retrospect, it was sort of imprudent to a pretty large degree, because if things had not been happening in California to make that sustainable, it would not only have been "agrarian," as you said, but it would have been at a very low level of economic return. I don't think we were thinking of that too much, and that's a sign of the imprudence also.

Teiser: What sorts of things did you look at in New Mexico?

Winiarski: It was to see grape growing, and I also got grapes there. I fermented grapes coming back to Chicago. I did look at apples there, for example, along the Rio Grande River in that green belt that goes through the state. There were a couple of places where they grew outstanding fruit. I knew one thing, Ruth. I knew there was no chance of sustaining ourselves at a mediocre level; whatever we had--if we had apples, it had to be prime fruit.

There's a little addition to this. (I told this story to Jim [James] Conaway in the book *Napa*¹.) It was on this trip that I took by myself and lived in the back of a station wagon and had little shades; you know, I made it into a little covered wagon sort of thing so that I could move very quickly and be free to stop wherever I needed to--maximum flexibility to discover the things that I wanted to.

Outside of the irrigated areas, the country is arid, and one day I stopped along the side of the road at a deserted adobe house that had been abandoned. There were picket fences around that had once enclosed something, and there was some old corn lying there from the last time it had been harvested. Maybe they had lived there only a short time and moved on, and maybe they would come back, but to all intents and purposes it was abandoned. It had an air of desolation, and the wind was blowing and tumbleweeds were rolling across my field of vision. The wind was doing this funny kind of whistling that it does. It's a kind of lonely, desolate sound--arid, deserted, and forsaken.

Something in me then said, "You're considering this? You're thinking about this? Your ancestors would curse you for having left what you left to come back to something like this, and your descendants will curse you for having opportunities and then bringing them to this." Within myself, I was being

¹Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

the playwright for the generations. That play sort of ended the thought of that enterprise.

Teiser: Then did you make a similar exploratory trip to California?

Winiarski: Right. That was later. I think that was about the time I had already decided. After the experience when our friend brought us the wine, and after the experience in New Mexico and thinking about what my parents did to help me be educated, what they sacrificed, the field narrowed down very tightly. I read Philip Wagner's book with renewed interest. In the course of the reading I was doing in these wine books, I read about Martin Ray in John Storm's book¹, I think it was--one of the very early books about California wine.

I had read Schoonmaker's book.² That was another strong influence. Philip Wagner's was a strong influence, and Schoonmaker was a strong influence, probably Philip the more so because he wrote about it so humanistically, about the inwardness of winemaking and grape growing, and this was more appealing. Schoonmaker's was more a sort of businesslike, commercial approach. It was valuable, but it didn't have the ability to stir and inspire the way Phil's did.

Teiser: Storm was someone Martin Ray knew?

Winiarski: Yes. The book was about California wine. It had been given to me by one of my colleagues at the university. He talked about a number of the small wineries, and there were only a few then --Mayacamas--the people who were able, by their diligence, by their perseverance, and by their application, to find a way on a small scale, not as an industrial enterprise and a commercial effort, but as a way of life rather than as a way of business. When you read the description of Martin Ray, you didn't think this man was pursuing a business; he was pursuing a way of life first and foremost, and it managed to be a business. That was very appealing, this idea of combining this, because it sort of brought together all those aspects we were thinking about.

Teiser: I know that Martin Ray was very inspiring to people.

¹John Storm, *An Invitation to Wine*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955.

²Frank Schoonmaker and Tom Marvel, *American Wines*. New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 1941.

Winiarski: He was. He had the ability to infuse qualities of uncommon interest, almost of magic. He had the ability to instill such a high degree of enthusiasm for what he was doing and to regard the things that he was doing with such enthusiasm that he was a very compelling figure, a very compelling spirit.

Teiser: How did you get him to accept you?

Winiarski: Well, he didn't quite. That didn't quite work.

Where are we now in our narrative? I more or less made a decision to try California, having read these books again and having reaffirmation that this was the right thing to do. The question was where and with whom and how this was all to be brought about.

##

Teiser: So you were pondering where to go?

Winiarski: The method. The objective, I think, was pretty clear by now, but the means were not clear. In reading this book--by the way, Chaffee Hall [of Hallcrest Vineyard] was one of these few [small wineries], if I'm not confusing it. There were a few; there was Lee [J. Leland] Stewart, the McCraes at Stony Hill, Martin Ray, Mayacamas, Chaffee Hall. But what had probably the greatest impact and attractiveness were the grand style wines by this man [Martin Ray] who seemed such a powerful presence to all who met him, to be larger than life itself up on this isolated mountain.

That may be an extreme formulation, but that seemed--if one knew how that could be accomplished, that would be helpful to a great and high degree to see how we might accomplish the same thing. I think I wrote to Martin, and I got this letter back from Peter Martin Ray, his son¹, from the University of Michigan. I wrote to him inspired by what I read about him and about what he was doing there.

By this time I knew something about California wines. I had not tasted any of Martin's wines, but there was a sense in me that the Californians were not on the whole doing enough with the fruit that they had to realize its full potential for excellence. It was sort of crazy to think that, but that's the way I perceived it. It was crazy to think that I could have anything to do with that, but I knew or had a very strong sense

¹His stepson. Martin Ray married Eleanor, Peter Martin Ray's mother.

that there must be people out there who were at the brink if not beyond the brink of achieving this excellence. Because the standard wines that came back to Chicago that I was able to get were not of this kind. They were good, but there was nothing of such surpassing excellence.

Experience at Martin Ray's Winery

Winiarski: From what I read of Martin in this book, I believed that he was trying to achieve this--from what people said about those wines. It was just sort of putting two and two together, making certain inferences from what they said. He had the quality level, he had achieved the level of excellence, that this way of life, if one could duplicate it, would be self-sustaining economically. That's what I had to find out about.

Teiser: Was he really self-sustaining economically in the end?

Winiarski: I don't know. I guessed he was; I supposed he was. But having learned some other things, maybe his stockbroker earnings were supporting that to a large degree, and his real estate endeavors with other people and the partners that he got in. All of these things could have been working for it. It appeared to be; however it was managed, it appeared to be achievable, and that was very important for us. Imprudent as I was, I did think about it being not just for one year or so but a change for the rest of our lives. Therefore somehow it had to provide the basis for doing this the rest of our lives and for raising our children and educating our children.

Teiser: What did his son say in his letter?

Winiarski: I think it was sort of a fan letter that I wrote to Martin, admiring him, expressing praise for the achievement, and all this sort of thing, and wondering whether there wasn't some way that I couldn't work with him and learn; whether there was some place in his enterprise which would permit someone to learn the things while working for him--an apprenticeship idea.

Then I got this letter back from Peter Martin Ray. I think he's still called that, isn't he? Whatever happened to him?

Teiser: He's still in charge of the winery, and he teaches at Stanford, I think.

Winiarski: Does he? Biology, botany. He was a man of some accomplishment in the field of biology or botany. His research was at a high level of sophistication. I mean, he had a very high order of acquaintance with the field. I'm not in a position to [judge his work], but he had a position with the university in research. He also wrote a sort of basic textbook.

The letter said that there was some possibility, because they had just made some changes in their organization. Someone had left them, and there was a possibility that they needed someone to help out with all the things that Martin did. It was pretty much a one-man operation--one-man guidance, one-man inspiration, one man not smelling every bung, perhaps, but pretty close to it.

In any case, he led me to believe there was hope that something that I wanted and something that they wanted would be to our mutual interest. That was a very exciting moment when I got that letter back. Then there was some further correspondence back and forth. I went out then to Ann Arbor to visit Peter and his family and to taste, finally, Martin Ray wines, which were a revelation. Beautiful wines. Chardonnays--I'd never tasted anything like that. I think it was whites only, if I recall.

Teiser: I didn't realize that the son had that much interest in the winery that early.

Winiarski: He came out there on occasion and worked there. He was Eleanor's son.

Teiser: Yes, I believe so--not Martin Ray's son.

Winiarski: Right. Martin adopted him, I believe, and then Peter assumed the name Peter Martin Ray.

The wines were extraordinary, stunning, a degree of artistic excellence that I had not experienced in California wines before. It was unquenchable, then, this desire to put this thing together and make it work. I thought to myself that it is people and their endeavors that really make this turn around--such stunning examples of excellence, such exquisite pleasure to accompany food and dining. By this time I had some experience with European wines and their similarities. They had some regional character, but still outstanding in light of that article of mine, "The Hierarchy of Wine Quality"¹. There

¹*Wines and Vines*, August 1986, pp.33-35.

is a hierarchy, and these wines were at the top of the hierarchy. They were excellent not for their regional qualities, not for their here-and-now qualities, but they could be at any time, in any place, and anyone would recognize them for quality.

Peter got these shipped in from Martin, I guess as part of his recompense so that he'd have the wines to entertain his friends. They knew about the wines, and they put them in a vault because even then they were so expensive that they were properly cared for in safe places.

Everything seemed to be satisfactory on both sides, and to explore this to the next step it was necessary to go to California. They arranged it for me, and I think they even provided for the passage from Chicago by train. Peter was bringing his family from Michigan, the train passed through Chicago and I got on the train. They were in a compartment, and I got another compartment, and we went across country on the old Santa Fe railroad. It went through Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming. Was it the Capitol Limited? They were trains that traveled through the night. We got off at Niles, a stop near Martin Ray's vineyard and winery, to go up to Cupertino and then up into the Santa Clara mountains.

It was the middle of winter when I went there. I think it was actually toward the end; it may have been February or March. It coincided with Peter's being off from his teaching responsibilities. As we traveled through the winter-scorched plains and through the snow-covered mountains, can you imagine what an experience it was looking out the window the day we came across the Donner Pass and descended into the Central Valley, where everything was green?

I spent a week at Mount Eden with Martin, Madame Pinot (Eleanor), Peter and his wife, Terry, and two of their children. They had built a building they called the chateau; the partners contributed towards having their own place of residence when they were there, part of which was for residential purposes and part for making wine. I believe they called that building the chateau, and I had a room in it. Above that was the house where Martin lived, and then they had a little guest house where Peter lived.

During this week I was to see how I liked them and how I liked the work, and how they liked me and how good I could do the work. I wasn't very good, I don't believe, but I did all right. For one of the farm jobs, I walked behind the tractor. They had just cleared one of the mountain tops for Chardonnay,

and I walked behind the tractor and picked roots out of the ground. I did some pruning. I can't remember whether I did some tractoring or not. I think I did some tractoring--driving a tractor. Yes, I remember there was a breakdown, and the disc that I was using broke down. I got Peter to help me, and I can't imagine how I got to that point--how I went back to get Peter to help me fix the disc--unless I had been driving the tractor. Let's assume that's correct. I was supposed to do as many things as possible during the time that I was there.

I helped them bottle. It was a fantastic experience. They bottled with a siphon hose from a barrel. Everything had its special magic. If you've never been up there, you don't know that Martin had accumulated a number of bells from schoolhouses that were no longer being used as schoolhouses. On occasions, when visitors came, they rang those bells. It was like a cathedral with all its bells ringing. It was ceremonial; it was formal; it was very special. It called for your taking strong notice, that this was not without its "breath of divinity," for it invited comparison with its churchlike original. The quality of the life there--there was nothing ordinary; not a thing was left to its ordinary disposition. It tried to be heightened, enhanced, increased in meaning. After a while you had to sort of rub your eyes, because you couldn't believe all this was happening.

All this lasted a week. If we are able to come back to these things I will be able fill in and speak about some of the specifics. I hesitate to tell you about the parties and the ceremonials that accompanied the eating, both casual meals and the special meals that took place. Maybe we can get into that if you think it's valuable, because that had something to do with it, too.

Peter and Terry drove me to the train station. They were going to spend another week at Mount Eden. I was feeling pretty good, but then I noticed there was a kind of silence, a lack of the typical easygoing vivacity which was characteristic of our previous relationship. I noticed this kind of strained quality to our conversation after while, and I couldn't quite figure it out. Anyway, I went back to Chicago, and then I got a message by letter (after I had written and thanked them for the week and for showing me all the things, and expressing my desire to go forward with our thoughts and discussions), saying that they had thought about it and--I forget how Martin put it: he didn't think it would work out because I was too independent. I think that's the phrase he used.

In the meanwhile, they had shown me the place that they expected me and my family--Barbara and our two children--to live. It was small. We chalked it out on the floor; we marked out where this would be, where that would be, where the other thing would be. It was small. We were still willing to do it, however, but that was a tough one, I tell you. It was tough to think about living there, and there was a little pause in my mind.

I had seen something of Martin's character at the same time, and that may have expressed itself while I was there. The magic--after I rubbed my eyes, some of the magic that I saw there didn't seem to be magic. I wondered how this was possible. There was a kind of unreality, and I wondered what would happen when the reality emerged. And yet I was so devoted to the idea and so desirous of going forward with the project that I thought, "Well, you just have to do all these things. You have to forget about that, not look at this, not see this, and forget about all these spaces that are so tight in this cabin." I thought to myself later that I would be willing to undergo this kind of "voluntary servitude," because that's what it would have to have been, but I really wondered if I could subject my family to the same thing.

Anyway, I still wanted to go forward with it, so when the letter came it was a blow. I wondered how that could be recovered. I talked to Peter on the phone, and I then went out to see them in Ann Arbor. We talked it over: could it work, would it work, why didn't it work? What was the independence, and what were the things that had to be done or couldn't be left off? I still thought, "Well, all those things may be problems--all the circumstances that might lead to difficulties--." I think I was trying to fool myself, that I could just forget about all those things. I think probably Martin was wiser and saw something about me that revealed to him that it probably wouldn't work.

So that was the Martin Ray story.

I think the lesson was invaluable for me, however it turned out, to see something of what I wanted to achieve--one rendition of it. To see this man, who was able to inspire, who did inspire, who evoked admiration, and whose achievements were magnificent at that time. Some people have a different sense of his wines. The wines I tasted were all outstanding. It was said that some bottles didn't live very long, and the wines were subject to oxidation and all that sort of thing. I, unfortunately or fortunately, did not have the experience of

the faulty wines the times I was there and the times I had them afterwards.

Reflecting on that afterwards, I thought Martin's great achievement was perhaps doomed to failure, because it took someone of that huge magnitude and capability to show what was possible. But maybe that magnitude was unavoidably accompanied by this--well, it's a tyrannical paranoia, if I could use this kind of semi-clinical description. There was a tyrannical spirit about him, absolutely to have everything his own way; and that goes with the other thing, because in paranoia, to feel that people are not with you *all* the way is an inevitable consequence of wanting *everything* your own way.

Teiser: But you saw California enough to want to return?

Winiarski: Yes. The idea was still very much alive. Maybe I went too far to an extreme in thinking about how much could be overcome. But as it turned out, I think the ending that came about was entirely appropriate. I immediately began to say, "Well, that's not going to be possible, so what else is possible? What else can be done?"

Teiser: It was fortunate that you saw it that way.

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Teiser: You had seen one part of California--

Winiarski: Yes, and the mountain life--this isolation and the endeavor. I heard some things when I was there that led me to believe that other people did not see eye to eye with Martin on how to do this: Gil Nickel and Jack Davies. So I knew this wasn't the only resolution, that there were other possibilities. Then: Well, what were they? What other people? There's the Napa Valley, there's Mayacamas, there's Lee Stewart. I began to write to other people, and I'd give the same presentation: "Here I am. I will do what's necessary in your organization. I'd like to learn how to do these things, and we can be of service to each other."

I got three letters back. Chaffee Hall wrote back and said there was no possibility; or did I hear that? I can't remember now. But two letters I do remember, one from Mayacamas and one from Lee Stewart. They were both in the same area, and that meant a trip to see what they were like and to talk further with them.

Something happened at Mayacamas between my letter to them and their letter coming back to me. Bob [Robert] Ellsworth, "The Compleat Winemaker," was there. He and Phoebe lived up there and were sort of running the thing. But I think something had happened, because the letter that I remember receiving, and the letter from Lee Stewart, said he had just had a change. They both indicated that it would be beneficial to come and see what they were like and talk further, and that's what I did. Bob remembers it differently. Bob remembers indicating that there wasn't any opening at Mayacamas. We were both trying to recollect the other day about how that happened.

I spent an afternoon up there, but then I found out that they didn't have anything, it really wasn't an opportunity. Bob and Phoebe kindly invited me to lunch in spite of the misunderstanding, and we had an interesting conversation. They were both very urbane and comforting, given the circumstances.

Working at Souverain, 1964-1966

Winiarski: I spent the balance of the time at Souverain, and there we did seem to hit it off; we did seem to have something that was beneficial for both of us in the proposal. So the deal was settled, and we made an arrangement for me to return in the middle of the summer before crush to establish my family. I didn't even have time then, I think, to definitely find a place for us to live, so that had to be done a little remotely. But we did find a place finally, and we arrived out there. Barbara should tell you some of the stories about coming across the country in this station wagon with a trailer. The first day out of Chicago we broke down because of the load we had. We had to have the engine rebuilt, and it was worn out by the time we got here. So we wore out two engines getting to California, traveling with two children and all the things I had--lots of books, bookcases. And books were still coming; books were still loaded on railway express, which had a depot in Vallejo at that time.

Teiser: What were your duties at Souverain?

Winiarski: I was the assistant winemaker in a two-man winery, so that meant do everything and anything. I tell you, that was a very good experience, because every step was available; every single step was open to observation, and you had to do every step, from the most inconsequential to the most important.

Teiser: As I have heard, Lee Stewart was another person who inspired young winemakers.

Winiarski: Right. He made some outstanding wines there, and they created a stylistic identity, that slightly sweet white wine of great cleanliness, great clarity, and with refreshing qualities. There weren't many examples of that in California. They were not magnificent wines, as Martin Ray's tended to be on a large scale, very sweeping statements of wine style, but at their level of complexity they were extremely refreshing, pleasant, agreeable, and expressed the fruit to a high degree. Martin's wines tended not to express the fruit but the complexity, and Lee's wines tended to be faithful to the expression of the fruit characteristics of the grapes, even such poor wines as Green Hungarian, which he made in those days. They are poor grapes, but by careful blending he made it in a style which was very pleasant, refreshing, appetizing--enlivening wines and very expressive of the fruit without complexities. Some people said maybe some of that was due to the below-threshold level of residual sugar that he left and also to the levels of CO₂. But there were not many wines of that character, and one found those wines boundlessly enlivening and pleasurable accompaniments for food.

Teiser: It sounds like the kinds of wines that Paul Masson made about that same time.

Winiarski: Well, I'll tell you, the whole idea of cold fermentation for California white wines was then in development by Lew [Lewis A.] Stern, who had been at Charles Krug. I think I met Lew Stern once, but I've been given to understand this--very cold fermentation and retaining some of the CO₂ developed during the fermentation, and a reasonable degree of acid and low, below-threshold levels of sugar. This type of wine--and I don't know how it got to Paul Masson; maybe Lew Stern was--

Teiser: Maybe I'm wrong. I suppose by then Peter Mondavi was making that type of wine.

Winiarski: Yes, and I think Peter and Lew Stern collaborated to a high degree for this. Who is actually the originator and how this came to be, I have no way to say. I knew Lew went then to Gallo. He had some physical infirmity, and it was difficult for him to continue. I think eventually he went to Gallo and helped with some of the techniques. I don't know where that originated--who sat down one night and worked out this formula--but certainly Lew had passed through Souverain at one time and was acquainted with Lee Stewart.

But it was more than that sort of accidental transmission. I think it was a kind of wine that represented Lee Stewart's personality more than anything else. It was a wine natural for him, because he was a man of extremely fastidious characteristics. One could almost say he was obsessively concerned with the minutiae and the detail and the cleanliness of all the process. Of course, this was a big--it was like Pasteur in the old days. Who would have thought that you needed to wash your hands when you did some things? The cleanliness of his operation was what struck me immediately--the scrupulous, even exceedingly scrupulous attention to all this kind of thing where the wine could have been unfavorably disadvantaged by carelessness.

Teiser: Where did Lee Stewart learn to make wine?

Winiarski: I'm not sure. I'm assuming that he had some assistance from all these people when he decided to give up chicken farming there. I think that's what he came there to do. He had left Armour and Company. He had what I understood was a pretty responsible position, and he sort of abandoned all that and went up to that hill and began to raise chickens.

Teiser: You learned things there that you wouldn't have learned at Martin Ray's?

Winiarski: Absolutely. Let me just continue that: I remember him telling me the story one day that the carrying of these sacks--he was a man of great strength, and he worked as a coal stoker on a train at one time, so he had lots of physical strength. He said something about becoming impatient with carrying those hundred-pound sacks of chicken feed. I think the difference between what you could earn from chickens and what you had to feed them became smaller and smaller, and this may have decided that the use that he was putting that property to was not giving the most economic benefit.

It would be interesting to pin that down a little bit. I think Lew Stern was part of it, André Tchelistcheff may have been part of it, and there may have been others when he decided--. I mean, that was really the kind of winery that you developed. You'd buy a barrel, you'd buy some grapes or grow some grapes, you eventually paid for the barrel when you'd sell some wines, and you'd buy another barrel.

That's the way we started here also. We didn't start with the resources. The building (our fifth building) that you saw when you passed by here is being built in a little different way. We do use the bank now, but in the old days--and I think

Lee went through this process. Of course he had loans later, but he was not only frugal but parsimonious, and some people would even say tight. [laughter] He was very prudent, very cautious. You can't say that a man who came out and abandoned that business career that he had was entirely without a gambling instinct, but yet there was this other part that was very parsimonious.

So that way of proceeding--you buy a barrel, pay for the barrel, buy another barrel maybe, or maybe another half a barrel if it's not a good year. [laughter]

Teiser: You certainly learned how to start from the ground up, then.

Winiarski: You said I learned things there that I would not have learned from Martin Ray, and I think that's quite right. That's a worthy thing to speculate on, but I certainly learned things from Lee. He was an enormously beneficial master.

Teiser: Was he generous with his information?

Winiarski: Well, yes and no. I think he came to see very quickly that my capacity for information was rather huge. He did try to dissuade me from an independent course; he did do that. He said at one time to me--at that time there were probably ten wineries in the valley--"There's probably room for two more wineries in this valley." Of course, I didn't believe that for a minute. I listened to that, but I couldn't believe it. I examined the argument, I examined all the things. Who knew at that time? I don't think there's anyone who knew. As we saw the wine prices move from \$3.50 or \$4 a bottle to \$5 a bottle--man, that was a huge jump.

When Joe [Joseph E.] Heitz came along with an \$8 or \$9 bottle of wine, that was phenomenal. Some of us knew that Martin Ray got extraordinary prices, and that's the sustainability idea--my idea that we could not do what we wanted to do on "culls," things that were culled. I knew Martin Ray's wines were not culls. Even when I was there I think he had sold some wine to the White House at extraordinary prices because there was some interest to get those wines, and that was the only way it would work.

So the sustainable idea. This excited a certain amount of interest in land; the fact that wines could be sold in quantity at this elevated price excited a certain amount of interest from nonprofessional and non-dedicated investors--people whose interest was monetary investment simply. That was one of the main ingredients in that later development that made possible

the excellence that we perceive today in the making of the wines, the growing of the grapes. You had to have this outside investor economic interest.

Teiser: There were tax advantages, too.

Winiarski: That was also there. All of those things. We didn't talk about the major ingredient, the accumulation of scientific information and things that people did at Davis. Maynard Amerine's work with grapes and where they grow best--that bulletin of the Agriculture Experiment Station at the University of California¹ that I used as a Bible, reading it in a devotional way. Every day you read a little bit of this, at night you read a little bit of that, getting intimately immersed in the contents. You read another chapter and tried to figure out what these must analyses could mean and what their significance was. The existence of such a rich body of knowledge was certainly another major ingredient.

And I think the other thing was the people, among whom I count myself, whose taste and aspirations were formed elsewhere and who brought in the ability to actually accomplish the coming together of these several elements.

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Teiser: Maybe you were again echoing this kind of community that you spoke of earlier.

Winemaking Technology of the Mid-1960s

Teiser: Did you find there was a community of interest in northern California, the wine people and their technology?

Winiarski: Yes, I wanted to be a part of that community, no question. To give you an example from my observations about the technology. In touring wineries when I got here, all red grapes were pretty much treated alike--fermentation time, pumping-over regime, degree of maceration, yeast strains, even malolactic organisms,

¹M. A. Amerine and A. J. Winkler. *California Wine Grapes: Composition and Quality of Their Musts and Wines*. California Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 794, 1944.

which was just beginning to come under a disciplined control. I'm not sure precisely when ML34 was isolated, but André had much to do with that. The importance of that was not universally appreciated. Lee, for example, tried to avoid malolactic, although André had conducted some experiments in barrels there and he had malolactic microflora in his tanks. Lee did not see the leavening quality that properly conducted malolactic fermentation imparted to the wine. He did not particularly appreciate it.

The real key, the real illuminating factor for me was how they treated the skins. In red grapes the skins are the life from whence the wine comes, and they were all treating them alike; every variety was treated alike in the fermenters, with the same pump-over regime, same times, same degree of pump over and degree of maceration. The difference between the varieties was simply not taken into account. The difference in the quality of the skins from one place to another was not taken into account, and that you might have to respond to that difference by a different treatment in the fermenter and a different form of maceration. Nobody talked about that.

You'd go from winery to winery, and you would see them pumping over twice a day for ten minutes or fifteen minutes or whatever it was, and the least skilled person in the winery was doing the pumping over, not responding to anything that was happening in that material that was before him. I mean, you are like a potter or sculptor, forming and shaping the material, and here they are; they have somebody from the vineyard that they brought in to pump over the wines because they didn't believe anything was particularly important about that stage. Granted it doesn't require the greatest skill, but to think you could bring someone from the vineyard, whose outlook is not conditioned to respond to and respect anything that's going on in that material--to expect that to make no difference indicates the neglect there was for a very important factor in red-wine making. That was, by the way, quite common in those days--that you'd get people in from the vineyard to work in the winery.

Teiser: When did this change take place, of differentiating the grapes and their qualities?

Winiarski: Gradually over the course of time people began to see that there were differences. I was certainly sensitive, and I think part of that comes from having to rework everything people told me and put in my own way. I couldn't believe that those skins were not responding differently and that it was not a major factor in what was going on for our red grapes, given that most

of the fermentations were short skin contact time and not long skin contact time.

Under French conditions, where you leave the maceration to take place for twenty days or so after that first four days of fermentation, it doesn't have the significance, because by that time the skins are all worn out; they've given all that they've got, so they're so to speak cooked. I believe that's quite true under those conditions, but under our conditions, as we were then making wine here, we had short fermentation. We had only four days to get the treasure from those skins, and how you got it made a difference for a variety, even for the same variety grown in different locations. For example, near the river or out on the hills, the skins yield their riches differently, they present themselves differently, and you only have these four days. So does it make any sense to have the extraction process be conducted by the least skillful person in the winery?

I think those observations, that awareness, that sensitivity (Pinot noir might have contributed because of its particularly recalcitrant character; it doesn't yield itself very easily, and you have to think about those skins a lot) might have caused reflections in some of the other varieties as well. People began to be sensitive, that here is a treasure that we are looking for in these skins. We have treated it with contempt, and that's not the way to get the best parts out of that material.

Teiser: Were you aware of temperature differences during fermentation?

Winiarski: Yes. I think everyone knew how excessively hot temperatures were negative. That I remember. Maybe we even swung too far to cold for a certain period of time, thinking that we had gone too hot, and now it was time to go too cold. As Gerald Asher said once so beautifully, "The pendulum that swings one way has yet to be invented." [laughter]

So we were fermenting too cold and not getting robust qualities. We were using red skins as though we were making white wine, I think, when we got below 70 degrees. I remember that was an effort that was made at Mondavi at one point when I was there. We were trying to get delicacy, and instead we were getting anemia.

Teiser: Why did you leave Lee Stewart?

Winiarski: I think that independence was coming out again. [laughter] I stayed two years, going through two crushes. I saw later in

our own employment practices at SLWC [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars] that someone who is bound to make his own wine learns the essentials of the process in two cycles of the vines' life. You can see that very well on a small scale, not so well on a large scale. There you only get a fragment of a whole process; you're only a segment, and you don't get to see the whole thing, and it may take a bit longer. But in a small winery, where the process is pretty much available to sight, and you go through it intimately in those two years, I think probably someone who is asking someone else the right questions, thinking the right thoughts, and asking himself the right questions and reading and doing all the right things--even starting as I did with no professional training--I think that's about the time it takes. If it's not happening then, you might get a little concerned to move on.

I may have been revealing that sort of thing. Lee initiated that. He may have thought this was the best decision, because it made an opportunity possible for me, for which I thanked him later. When we visited together years later, he came back to our winery and we talked. I showed him in the winery how I was making the notches in my bungs, just the way he did, so that they lined up with the grain of the wood, a little subtlety that I believe not many people were doing. Now, of course, we have bungs that are not wood, so this is an aspect which is completely lost. We have surgical rubber bungs now, and they don't have any orientation or grain. I kind of think that's too bad--not in itself, perhaps, but because the use of surgical rubber bungs doesn't require certain habits and dispositions of care, so other aspects might reflect a lack of care also.

We talked about my leaving, and I think we both agreed that it was the very best thing that could have happened.

Teiser: Going to Robert Mondavi in '66--that was quite a different operation, wasn't it?

Winiarski: Yes, it was. Lee had only one kind of pump, which we will call a positive pump. That means it creates its own suction. He thought that was better, that it was gentler. He was in general right, but at a certain stage of the wine's life it doesn't really make a huge significance. However, I didn't know another kind of pump existed, because all I had learned was the modes of wine transfer at this small winery, and we only had one kind of pump. It was a great shock as well as a chastening experience for me to realize that I didn't know everything. [laughter]

Teiser: Maybe this is a good place to break and begin next time with your time at Robert Mondavi.

Winiarski: That would be fine.

Starting Up the Robert Mondavi Winery, 1966-1968

[Interview 2: July 25, 1991]##

Teiser: How long had Robert Mondavi been operating when you went there?

Winiarski: They hadn't been operating at all. I came there in the year that was their very first year, 1966, the year they broke ground.

Teiser: I see. What did you do?

Winiarski: I moved laterally, I think one could say. That would not be an inappropriate term. Mike [Michael Mondavi] was doing his national guard duty. I think he was married that spring or early summer, and they broke ground somewhat in the middle of the summer. I was really the only experienced winemaking person that they had around. Bob originally intended to do his own winemaking, but I think they rapidly realized that between trying to get the building up and organizing all the details they had for running the winery, financially and otherwise, there simply was not any time available for him to be doing that sort of thing. The equipment came in, and it had to be situated, organized, put into place.

I spoke to André Tchelistcheff, who made the suggestion, after I parted ways with Lee Stewart, that I should talk to Ivan Schoch, which I did. Ivan Schoch was one of the partners in the Mondavi enterprise in that year. Then Ivan spoke to Robert, and I had a meeting with both of them over at Ivan's house. They made a commitment that we would go forward with my participation in the winery when construction began and when it was time. I'm not sure construction hadn't already begun, or at least foundations and footings and that sort of thing, but there was no building and there was no winemaking facility. I was supposed to be in charge of helping to get all of that organized, which I did.

There weren't always winemaking things to do, equipment wasn't always arriving, and overseeing some parts of that wasn't always happening, so when it wasn't I would pick up a

hammer or a crowbar or a wiring device or a plumbing tool or a pipe. Bob was there at the same time, as much as he could, and we put that winery together with the carpenters, the masons, the plumbers, the electricians, and the winemakers all working on top of each other that year.

Teiser: Were you making wine outdoors?

Winiarski: Yes. For a while there was no roof. There were walls, but there were no catwalks, no ladders. We had to make ladders. The crushing had to take place before everything else was in place for it to happen. You know, it was a frustrating experience, because some of the pieces that were necessary were not in place. It was like the nail in the horseshoe that lost the kingdom in another famous incident. We were frustrated trying to do a very simple operation for the want of a single piece that someone had not remembered was necessary to operate the whole thing. We had to find the piece before we could do what we had to do. It was quite an experience.

Teiser: It must have given you a lot of knowledge to apply to your own buildings.

Winiarski: Indeed, out here at our new building it's a similar situation. Of course, we've got an existing winery in operation here today, so that if we do happen to forget something we can go right over and find what we need. This is kind of an additional facility. We had a little bit of that same situation and same access in 1966, because although the Mondavi brothers were, you might say, going their separate ways, we did have quite a bit of assistance from people and from things at Charles Krug. Even some grapes were exchanged, I believe. Certainly I remember that Bill Bonetti was there at that time, and we did even get some laboratory work done. Bill Bonetti I'm assuming had Peter's implicit if not explicit authorization to go and do certain things for us, and we took some things over to get tested. We were titrating in buckets; that's what it amounted to. It's quite an interesting thing if you have to titrate in buckets. That's a little bit of an exaggeration, but it gives you the flavor of the kind of mild chaos that was present in 1966.

Gradually, though, things began to fall into place. We did have the assistance of not only the Krug establishment but many other people in the valley to make that work. I do remember that. Many people bent over backwards to give us whatever counsel and guidance we needed as well as actual material assistance. Louis [P.] Martini, I remember, was helpful, and we got some assistance some time from BV [Beaulieu

Vineyard]. Altogether there were many people who pitched in under those extraordinary, difficult, and trying circumstances to help Bob get started.

Teiser: There was a lot of sympathy in the valley for each of the brothers.

Winiarski: Yes, that's certainly true. People were disturbed that this had occurred. They didn't talk about it very much and sort of looked the other way, but they did what they could to heal the rift and to make whatever contribution they could to make it possible for the rift to be resolved.

Teiser: By the time you left, two years later, was the winery complete?

Winiarski: Oh, yes, the building was completed. Quite a bit of planning had gone into the staging of the various things, and eventually all the pieces were put together. We were making wine in a kind of calm, deliberate way even toward the end of the crush that first year in '66, again without full facilities, without ease, without smoothness, but with relatively calm circumstances.

That was a late crush; it was a late harvest in 1966. The last Cabernet grapes came in on November 11. I remember that holiday, Veteran's Day. It was very cool there at the Oakville location; there was fog all morning, so we had the advantage of that. Now that you mention it, it's very similar to this year, isn't it? This year is turning out to be a very cool year--very cool nights, fog frequently until ten or eleven o'clock in the morning.

Teiser: Are you going to have a good crop?

Winiarski: Let's hope so. We have a very good-sized crop out there. The size is wonderful. Whether we'll get all those grapes ripe is another question.

But, as I say, it was running smoothly toward the end, helped by the fact that, because of the coolness, we weren't rushed in the harvest. So even that first year the basic facility was almost complete. But other things were still to be done, and the destiny of the winery was only beginning to unfold.

Teiser: Who was the winemaker then?

Winiarski: Well, Mike [Michael Mondavi] eventually came back. I think they hired a laboratory person, although I still continued to

do things in the lab: I ran basic tests--the trial fining tests--made the blends the first year, and did some of the analytical work of a simple nature--the sulfur content, the acid and pH determinations. I'm not sure, but that first year I don't think we had specifically a trained, technical person in the laboratory. That's my recollection. I remember doing the fining trials, for example, making equivalent samples in small bottles of what we might do in the tank and trying the different levels of fining agents to see what the effect of the fining agent would be, and therefore providing the basics to make a decision. Bob would be in on it, and later Mike would be in on it also. Bob's partners, Fred Holmes and Ivan Schoch, would be in on those tastings. They were held both at the winery and at Bob's house. I would make up the equivalent samples, we would all taste the various levels of fining material, and then a decision would be made as to what level of fining would best help to perfect the wine.

Teiser: As you progressed, then, did you have more specialized help at the winery?

Winiarski: I think the following year there was even more grapes than there had been the year previous, and there were additional people. At some point someone came in the lab because we were getting more complicated.

Teiser: Was Mike [Miljenko] Grgich working there then?

Winiarski: I don't think so. I think Mike came in after I left, if I'm not mistaken. He was still at BV. I left in '68, so I was there for two crushes also, in '66--although I'm not sure you would call that a crush or a construction time, it was so much of both--and '67. I left prior to the harvest in '68. Mike I think was not there at the time.

Teiser: Had Zelma Long come in?

Winiarski: No, Zelma wasn't there either. I think Mike came in either shortly after that or a little later.

The Denver Winemaking Enterprise, 1968-1970

Teiser: How did you happen to leave?

Winiarski: Do you remember that two-year cycle I spoke about? After two two-year cycles, one having to do with what you might call a

village art as practiced by Lee Stewart, and the other with a high technology component as at Robert Mondavi, I thought I had seen both poles of the possibilities for the industry. We had meanwhile established a vineyard of our own up on Howell Mountain from land that I purchased out of our own resources. That Cabernet sauvignon vineyard, by the way, was the first one of that variety ever planted on Howell Mountain.

I thought it was time to move on, and I was talking to other people about what possibilities there were, I suppose still thinking more about our own enterprise more than any specific additional move laterally. I think I was thinking about finally embarking on our own venture.

That came up with the Ivancie situation which you asked about.

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Teiser: Ivancie was a company in Denver. Was it a retailer?

Winiarski: No, Dr. Gerald Ivancie was a man who loved wine, and he loved the idea of wine. He loved the idea of making wine, and with friends he had made wine from grapes that they had brought in from California for a number of years before he decided to enter upon the commercial aspect of it in Denver. His idea was fairly simple and can be described as follows: We have now the technology of refrigerated transport, and it was roughly thirty hours from California to Denver by refrigerated transport (in those days. I don't know what it is now; it might quite possibly be much shorter). I think he expressed it this way, "If we can't get Mohammed to the mountain, we'll bring the mountain to Mohammed." [laughter]

He thought the best thing to do would be to bring the grapes from California to Denver, make them into wine, and have what would be a unique marketing approach for the Denver audience--California wines made in Denver, operated by a well-known Denver resident. He was a periodontic surgeon, I think, so he was well known socially and had lots of connections in the business world and elsewhere, and he thought that would be translatable into a certain marketing advantage. He couldn't get all the good wines in those days that he wanted into Denver, and he thought this would be a way to do it and establish himself as a marketing presence at the same time.

He came out and was looking for grapes. He got my name somehow as someone who knew where various kinds of grapes were grown and what their quality characteristics were. He sought

advice as to where the grapes he was interested in did well and where they were obtainable. His program appeared to offer a possibility of making the skills that I had acquired more valuable to other people who were in such a "beginning" situation. He also had some rented space in Denver where he wanted to construct a facility. He very much wanted to start his own winery. He made an offer that in those days was irresistible, and I thought this would be a beneficial step to utilize some of the things I had learned in the past four years.

We did work together for that harvest.

Teiser: Did you go back and forth?

Winiarski: I went back and forth to Denver--that was the idea--as an itinerant winemaker. I gave him the opportunity to procure for himself the grapes, because I simply indicated where I thought grapes might be of good quality, and he made those further business arrangements and arranged for the transport. I arranged for the loading of the grapes onto the transport. That seemed like a marvelous idea. If this would really work out, it was quite an extraordinary and interesting endeavor.

We loaded the grapes here frequently. That happened maybe two or three different times for different types of grapes. We used Gamay beaujolais, and we used Cabernet and Pinot, but none of the white grapes because we perceived that that might be more risky in transport. Then I would get on a plane, and I would be in Denver when the truck arrived with the grapes. Quite an interesting thing.

Teiser: What kind of equipment did he have?

Winiarski: He had secured small-scale but best-quality equipment. He had stainless steel tanks and fermenters, and he had proper refrigeration, some of which I helped him to specify and obtain. He had a beautiful crusher from Art Rafanelli at Healdsburg Machine Company. He had pumps and all the necessary paraphernalia for doing a good job with the grapes. And the wines were pretty good! Some people have told me that they recently tasted some of the wines that they had purchased when they were released in Denver, and they were very pleased. They thought at the time that the grapes came from local sources; they didn't realize they were actually from California. In general it was a very enlightening venture.

Meanwhile we were doing other things, too. We had established this vineyard I told you about.

Teiser: Was the Ivancie enterprise successful?

Winiarski: I think it was. I think the first wines that we made were sought after. He attracted other people to the endeavor on the basis of these first efforts. They even thought at one time of purchasing land in the Grand Junction area to grow grapes, and I think they did so under different management. When Dr. Ivancie was no longer involved they had professional management. Their problem, I think, eventually turned out to be a certain amount of inexperience with what it actually took, on a first-hand basis, to run a winery. Their professional management decided that it would be appropriate for them to try to do everything in Denver, and they got to be quite a substantial organization as far as financing from local sources, but I think eventually their marketing considerations got top-heavy, and that put them under a severe financial burden. Also I think they didn't quite realize that these production things, if not done by yourself as a single guiding mind--I don't mean a single person necessarily, but to start that way, you have to at least know how to do it all by yourself. You have to be able to do all the things yourself and to be capable of making all the decisions yourself and be properly organized.

That was my perspective. Eventually they couldn't support the organization they put together. I think most of those grapes that were put in at Grand Junction were eventually sold to another winery or to hobby winemakers. There was another effort to keep the winery going, and I think probably by that time Dr. Ivancie decided he had better spend most of his remaining time in his professional career--in his first profession. He was by that time completely separated from the venture.

Teiser: Meanwhile you were back here in the Napa Valley buying land.

Winiarski: Well, we bought the SLV [Stag's Leap Vineyard] land in 1970.

Teiser: How much land did you buy?

Winiarski: About 40 acres. We bought SLV on the basis of having tasted some wines that Nathan Fay had grown. Where are we in the chronology?

Teiser: We're just at the beginning of your own enterprise.

Consulting and Studying, 1968-1970

- Winiarski: What I did was consult for others in Sonoma County and Mendocino County. There were a number of wineries that were bulk producers for the most part, who were not acquainted with preparing wines for bottling. Certainly I had acquired that skill at Robert Mondavi winery.
- Teiser: Which wineries did you work with?
- Winiarski: Parducci for one, Pedroncelli, if memory serves, for another. There were a number that I did different things for up in that area. That's the way I supported myself--with Ivancie and with consulting for California wineries that were making that conversion at that time and needed transition assistance because they were not ready to establish themselves first-off with a complete organization the way Dr. Ivancie eventually thought to do in Denver. They were making that transition slowly, and they needed some transition consultation. At that time Parducci didn't even have stainless steel tanks. Their wines, for the most part, were sold in bulk, but they wanted to get started in bottling and marketing for themselves on a large scale. It was a perfect match for my own skills in helping bring wines to completion, to a state where they were finished in a more complete way than they had been for bulk sales before. The next step that I could help with was in stabilizing and otherwise preparing the wine for bottling. The final step for me was in organizing and executing the bottling itself.
- Teiser: Were you consulting about their bottling facilities and about their technique of bottling, too?
- Winiarski: Yes, the technique of bottling and preparing the wines for bottling both.
- Teiser: At some point you also took a short course or two at UC Davis?
- Winiarski: Oh, I took all the short courses, every one I could, and read all the time. Someone remarked to me that the two teachers I had were not the kind of people who could or would sort of pull you aside and say, "Now, this is the lesson for today." That remark is perfectly just. We had work to do. This was not an educational endeavor that they were running. They were running wineries, right? And Robert Mondavi in addition was building a large organization. There wasn't time for the "this is the lesson for today" kind of approach to things, but you learned as you worked. But in order to learn enough and deeply enough

and comprehensively enough, you had to be thinking all the time of what you were doing and why you were doing it. Gradually you saw that if you did steps one, two, and three, step four was necessary. The sequence of things and the whole grid, the matrix of things that I had to learn was becoming clearer to me because I was taking all the short courses and reading. But perhaps more importantly because after coming home from working and doing all those things, I would try to find out why I did those things. So it was perhaps because my two main teachers were not "here is the lesson for today" fellows that I had a huge need to ask *myself* what the lesson for today was.

Teiser: So you were learning theory on top of the practice.

Winiarski: Yes. Not only that you do this kind of thing, but why you do this kind of thing and how many steps were implicated further forward and behind. I was putting all this together, so it wasn't necessary for someone to tell me, "This is the lesson for the day," because I was already figuring out what the lesson was and how all these things fit together and looking for the larger picture that was emerging through all these mechanisms--through working with it, through asking key questions. Sometimes I would ask a key question, and a short, simple answer would illuminate a complex whole without a long explanation. So someone didn't always have to explain to you steps one, two, three, and four, because if you asked the right question about step five, you knew that the other steps were predecessors for that one and that there were successive steps as well.

This whole picture was emerging. You asked specifically about the short courses, and that was of enormous benefit. Talking to people was another enormous benefit. Tasting different batches of wine--I think this is what led to the discussion of the vineyard. Since I had developed, in addition to the acquaintances in the places where I worked, a large variety of friends who were making wine or assisting in making wine and working in various phases of the industry, they graciously permitted me to taste wines in other cellars before they were blended.

Teiser: What years did you take the short courses?

Winiarski: I think the first one may have been in 1965. I took the [Napa] wine library course in the fall of 1964. Thereafter in 1966, 1967, 1968. I don't remember exactly, but it was almost every year, and then I began to take the viticulture seminars as well, through the mid-seventies.

You remember we talked yesterday about the fact that most people that I knew about in those days treated all the red wines alike, with the same pump-over regimes and without making fine distinctions? Also no one was bottling wines in those days to reflect regional distinctiveness of a given variety in the different parts of the Napa Valley. There was no one bottling a Howell Mountain Zinfandel or a Stag's Leap district Cabernet or a Spring Mountain Cabernet. These were just ideas, very generalized, and it was not part of any winery practice I know of to separate these different lots for purposes either of identification or for purposes of following those different local characteristics all the way through to the bottling. The scope was more generalized. Division was more generalized. Even though I think some of the winemakers paid attention to the differences, they were not going to follow those differences through. It was not the destiny of those grapes to be separately bottled.

But that was of intense interest for me, to see these differences and to try to identify the characteristics, because we were still looking for our land, and I still had the idea that Cabernet was so fine and so rich in possibilities that this is what I would like to do. It was a very practical interest as well as a theoretical interest to identify the regional characteristics.

Teiser: Going back to your Davis short courses, was there anyone you worked with there or took courses from who was particularly helpful?

Winiarski: I don't think that's quite the way they were set up--to specialize with particular people. I remember Harold Berg, Maynard Amerine, and Vern [Vernon L.] Singleton. Jim [James A.] Cook was there giving courses.

Teiser: The whole faculty was teaching.

Winiarski: Yes, and the short courses. The viticulturalist A. [Amand N.] Kasimatis was there. Microbiology was Ralph Kunkee. I think he is still there. There were many people who presented topics of their specialty, and these short courses went on for two or three days, so you had a variety of presentations in that period of time, all very useful and all very necessary and immensely helpful for me. Without that capability I wouldn't have been able to do what I have done. The availability of those subjects to be reviewed in such a concise and yet comprehensive way was very important. The whole scientific aspect of this field was very much in ferment (without making a pun) at this time, so it was an exciting time. People were

discovering new things, elaborating new approaches, and I was partaking in that. That was a very exciting and stimulating aspect of it.

Teiser: It was a wonderful group of people at Davis then.

Winiarski: Yes, very. Have we left out anyone? Corny [Cornelius] Ough was there, naturally, and he gave part of the discussions. Dinny [A. Dinsmoor] Webb also. Some of the senior folks, the ones who had lots of practical experience, like Harold Berg, gave enormously helpful presentations from that perspective. There were people attending the classes with variegated preparation and backgrounds, so they had people who were highly expert technically as well as people like myself, who had only very general knowledge of this, some practical experience, but interested in learning and intensely concentrated on the topic. You had this wide spread, and the teachers at Davis managed to bridge this spread of preparation, competence, and interest with great success.

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Teiser: All this time you were thinking about--

Winiarski: Our own vineyard.

Teiser: And matching your knowledge of the areas here with what land was available, I suppose?

Winiarski: Right, land that was available. For example, every time there was a frost, I would go out and visit these various areas to see whether damage was more in certain areas than others, where it was free from damage, and all this sort of thing. I did this not only to coordinate the soil types and what I perceived to be the growing microclimate (I think they call them mesoclimates now), but these major, very practical influences--what areas were relatively frost free, what areas were almost invariably subject to frost. All these, I hoped, would begin pointing in certain directions so that I could begin to prioritize, if we had the opportunity, where this land would be. It wasn't clear that we were going to be able to do this on the scale that would permit us to live from it without other assistance.

Teiser: Were you visualizing being able to make the transition from working for others to working for yourself in a certain way? Was there a point at which you felt you could just work for yourself?

Winiarski: No. I hadn't specified that. I was hoping that would come, and eventually something would present itself that looked like the opportunity to make that possible. But first I knew that to make that possible I had to get people interested. I mean, in the future that may have presented itself, but I would have to know enough about this whole field to make some kind of judgment myself. It would be something that I would want to do, and by acquiring the knowledge, be able to do.

Starting a Vineyard on Howell Mountain, Spring 1965

Winiarski: You know, we had established this vineyard on Howell Mountain. We bought some land up there in 1965. We moved from the first place we lived in the Napa Valley, below Souverain cellars in a place called Crystal Springs, up onto Howell Mountain and lived on property that had once been used as a stagecoach resting place by the Wells Fargo company; it was the rest stop on the way from Pope Valley to the Napa Valley. The Pope Valley to Napa Valley segment was only a part of a larger trail that Wells Fargo had, and this ranch had been the way station and overnight stopping point, I suppose, also.

Teiser: How many acres did you buy?

Winiarski: It was about thirty acres, and about ten acres of it were plantable.

Teiser: Was it planted?

Winiarski: It had not been planted. I bought the thirty acres from a man who was a successor to the interest of the Wells Fargo Company. He grew grapes on another part of the Wells Fargo property. It was called the Nurenberger ranch, but my part of it, which he subdivided, had never been in grapes.

Teiser: What did you plant?

Winiarski: We planted Cabernet sauvignon. As far as I have any reason to believe, this was the first Cabernet ever planted on Howell Mountain. This land was above the thermal belt, which made it subject to cool nights, warm days. It was located above the valley frost, and it was on red soil, which I then believed and still do believe makes for intensification of the varietal character in a red wine. Since it was on light soil, it promised to fulfill all the sort of mystical expectations that one develops, thinking that lean soils produce outstanding

fruit. It was also the kind of soil where the annual, vegetative aspect of a vine's life would not have a tendency to develop excessive vigor and where the vine could therefore concentrate on making beautiful, expressive fruit.

So it had all these characteristics. I talked about frost, and while it was subject to a minimum amount of frost, I thought that was fairly infrequent. All these things came together for that vineyard and suggested that it would make outstanding Cabernet.

Teiser: And did it?

Winiarski: Well, I didn't have very many vintages of that to work with. It's near land that Randy [Randall] Dunn uses for his grapes today, and many others have established vineyards in that vicinity for Cabernet.

Teiser: Doesn't Ridge get some of its Zinfandels there?

Winiarski: They do, from the Beatty ranch. Where does that Howell Mountain Zinfandel come from? There are three old vineyards. The first was from the Nurenberger vineyard. Another was from land that Keith Bowers owned at that time, which is now owned by Doris Muscatine. I think that was the old Mackie place; I think he was Finnish. Then there was the Ferrazzi ranch. That was further back in the mountain, and that may be the source of the Howell Mountain Zinfandel.

Teiser: I know he gets some now from the Muscatine property.

Winiarski: Oh, he does? Keith Bowers, who was both the county extension agent for viticulture for the University of California and the farm advisor for Napa County, eventually planted some Cabernet.

Teiser: Is he still alive?

Winiarski: Yes, Keith is retired now but still living here. A wonderful family. His recollection of some of the things that went on in the early days in the valley would be extremely valuable.

Teiser: Yes, he saw big changes here.

When did you start harvesting enough from that property to--

Winiarski: You see, we sold it to buy SLV. We couldn't do it without having sold that property, since our resources were minimal when we came here. You might even say less than minimal.

[laughs] We put together a partnership, but our contribution to that partnership was not only having discovered that land and organizing the partnership, but we also made a monetary contribution to that partnership as well. Our share (the financial contributors were divided equally between all the partners) came in part from that first land. We had to sell the land on Howell Mountain and to transform our labors here into the new land.

Teiser: That was done in 1970?

Winiarski: Yes. But after all these regional investigations, after all these attempts to find where all those factors converged-- frost, the quality of the land, the assumed quality of the fruit from given soils and from different microclimates, and all these things that I had been working to put together and make converge to spotlight the place where I thought the best Cabernet would come from--. Some of this came from reflections later; not all of this was perfectly obvious to me at the time. Thinking about it afterwards, there was something working to put all this together, but all those steps weren't perfectly conscious and perfectly deliberate. I was doing all that investigation, things were falling into place little by little, but they weren't all organized with a perfect sense of how the organization should be and how all the steps were put together. Some things were very haphazard, I'm sure, and it's only on reflecting on it afterwards that the coherence of the whole thing become visible. As has been said so many times, there's nothing like twenty-twenty hindsight. But reflection afterwards made it compellingly clear to me that *something* was sorting and sifting all the elements into what emerged as coherent progress.

One thing that did make a larger impression than some of the other things and turned on again this light of illumination--someone suggested to me that our irrigation techniques up on Howell Mountain were too labor intensive. I irrigated that land from the back of a truck with buckets, made basins in front of each vine--you know, the old-timers did it this way; you make a basin in front of each vine, and then you put water in these basins, and that's the way you irrigate. You give them five gallons or seven gallons, and then you close up the basin. Well, this is very labor intensive, digging these basins and doing all this.

Besides, it occurred to me afterwards, since you dig this basin you are very near to the roots of this young rooting that you have put in, and those root hairs are very delicate and fragile. This water has a certain velocity when it begins to

pass through the soil, and because you dig this basin you are closer to that root than if you had your basin at the surface soil level and it percolated slowly. By the time it reached the lower levels, these root hairs would be relatively undamaged. You would lose some root hairs, but you would gain, of course, by the water. Maybe we could avoid losing this. That was my theory.

Someone said, "Nathan Fay has devised a way to do this with a plow. You don't have to dig each basin by hand." The idea of a plow struck me as being interesting. If you could throw up a rill, a ridge, on both sides of the vines and do it all in a row, then you wouldn't have the bottom of your basin six inches into the ground; you would have it at ground level. The ridges that you threw up with the plow on both sides would be the sides of the embankment, and you wouldn't have this inconvenience, if it was occurring, of breaking up the root hairs as you irrigated each time.

I thought I should see that, and I came down to visit with Nathan. Well, it wasn't quite as it had been described, but it had enough improvements in my own technique of watering so that I wanted to use it. We got to talking about this thing and that, and then he invited me in to taste some of the wines that he had made from Cabernet in his ground, right out in front here. [points to the original Fay vineyard] "Right out in front here" means that the location is to the east of where we are sitting overlooking this little interior valley surrounded by hills.

Nathan was the first to plant Cabernet in this area. He told me once there were only seven hundred acres of Cabernet in the whole state when he planted this land. Does that sound right to you? This was in 1960.

Teiser: I don't know.

Winiarski: I should check this. [Added later:] According to CDFA [California Department of Food and Agriculture], that is correct: in 1960, 721 total acres of Cabernet sauvignon planted in the whole state! Currently it's 34,000 acres. But surely I knew there were no Cabernet planted south of the Oakville crossroad. People said, "It's too cool down here." Indeed, none of this land was planted to varieties except Nathan's. All that [indicates] was pasture. Our land was prunes, cherries, apples, and a small amount of the old standard grapes. The field that is now planted by Mondavi across the way was pasture, dairy land, and there was hay land beyond. The Reguscis had some Zinfandel up on the hill because

it was out of the frost; people thought when you got down below the steep slopes it was too frosty. This little hill land, because of the slope of the land, tends to be relatively frost free; this is affectionately known as the "banana belt" in here, because we turn the wine machines on very little to defend the vines against frost.

Teiser: You are gesturing toward the east.

Winiarski: Yes. So there were very, very few vines around here altogether. Regusci was pasture, prunes; SLV was mainly prunes; this was pasture. Stelzner had a little bit of grapes back here when we moved here in 1970, but in 1960 he wasn't here. None of the other plantings around here existed then.

Nathan possessed real daring and pioneering spirit to do what he did. It's lonely, if you think of it. You prepare the ground, you plant the vines; you're waiting about two years for the time the vines make their own first leaf after the graft in the first year. The second year it doesn't have any fruit, and the third year you might have a bit of fruit, but if you're sensible you cut it all off. So now it's four years and maybe five years since you've prepared the ground before you taste any of the relatively mature fruit from relatively adolescent vines. Maybe it's six years, and maybe it takes a year or two in the winery before it develops any kind of subtlety. You might say a whole decade passes before the sense of what this land can produce planted to this varietal is at all visible. That's a third of a man's adult working life, or maybe a little bit less.

Teiser: It certainly is a long time for a man who doesn't have much money to start with.

Winiarski: No question. This is a highly venturesome, speculative endeavor. Now, people did recommend to Nathan that he plant Cabernet, but I don't think any of these people were certain of the outcome. I mean, it's impossible that they could have known what the outcome would be. They were thinking more in terms, I believe, of what they would like to have happen or, less charitably, of what variety was increasing in popularity, rather than a sure-thing result. The important thing is that no matter how well or ill informed one's recommendations are, they do not change the character and the magnitude of the risk and the quality of daring that was involved in this unknown area or in an untried variety.

Teiser: That was your introduction, then, to that area of the Napa Valley?

Winiarski: It was. That's exactly right.

III STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS

Introduction to the Property. 1969

Winiarski: It was in 1969, I think, when I came down to get this assistance for thinking about irrigation, and I tasted the '68 wine that Nathan made himself. He had already been selling the grapes from his land to Krug for a number of years, and I think they were esteemed. But he also made his own wine, and I tasted that wine. When I tasted his wine, I said, "Eureka! That's it; that's the grape that satisfies what I believe to be most expressive of the variety. It has not only regional character but also has elements of 'classic' character." That is to say, it had all the characteristics that I thought would not only express regional distinctiveness but had also the potential to express the classical characteristics if properly vinified.

From that point on--I think I even said something to Nathan: "Where do these grapes come from?" He said, "Those are my grapes," because he had some others; he had some white grapes, and he had some different wines that we were tasting that were not all his own. He and Father Tom Turnbull grew grapes together for many years. Father Tom eventually bought some land from Nathan over there, and produced his own grapes. He's passed away now, but they worked together and made wine together for many years.

Anyway, the wine which was such a revelation to me was made from Nathan's Cabernet sauvignon grapes, and I believe they were from 1968.

Teiser: You could tell in that young a wine?

Winiarski: I could tell in *that* young wine. It had the characteristics that I was looking for. We tasted other wines, and they really confirmed it. Maybe I had the germ of the idea from that wine.

We did taste older wines, and all the evolution of the wine from more grapes suggested the same qualities and virtues that I tasted in that first sip. So at that time, the conclusion was: we had to buy some land in this area.

By chance, the adjoining Heid ranch was available. My mother had been suggesting for a number of years that if we were going to do this California adventure--I mean, she sort of didn't approve of it when we did it in the first place, but she suggested that we should be thinking about buying land. When this land came up, she provided, in a manner of speaking, the seeds for the venture. We sold our first vineyard in Angwin of course, but really the seed for this SLV venture came from her making available by a form of a loan to us some capital by means of which we attracted others. That was really the first part of it. So we had her help, and then we got the partners' help, and we eventually succeeded in purchasing what became SLV and planning the development, pulling out the prunes--ten acres the first year and the balance of it the second year--and replanting to Cabernet.

[Interview 3: March 24, 1993]##

Winiarski: We seem to be getting a little more historical. The anecdotal part of it serves its purpose at the beginning, because that's what it was. There were no themes there, really, and now we are getting to some of the thematic parts.

Teiser: The general theme really should be what is your dominant idea, and what are the things you are doing and have done to go toward that idea. You clearly have a more abstract concept than a lot of people who go into the wine business. It seems to me that what is important about this interview is that you can express what it is that you have been wanting to do, have done, and will be wanting to do. It's very interesting to have someone as articulate as you keep this in mind.

Winiarski: I will keep that in mind, because it might have some value for others to think about.

Teiser: I don't know what most people have in mind when they go into the wine business. A lot of them just want to lead country lives, I think.

Winiarski: I'm not sure we were far from that in the beginning; that sort of agrarian aspect certainly made it attractive. When I saw

what was happening up at Martin Ray's, that was certainly part of it--the fact that he had the economic resources to support that. The question for us, then, was whether, not starting with his resources, we could pursue that way of life and at the same time make it sustainable economically so that we could live from it. You and I talked a little bit about that in the course of the interview--that this was an issue. Maybe that's not possible any more, but that agrarian aspect was certainly attractive as a way of thinking about what we wanted to do.

So we are just purchasing that vineyard from the Heids after that visit to Nathan Fay--tasting his wine and deciding that this was the place that would express most fully the character of the wine that I wanted to make from Cabernet grapes. This was a place I thought was most appealing to me, most attractive, most expressive of the characteristics that I would like to have embodied in a wine. This area did that for those grapes.

We were at the point where it became the quest to identify some land that might be purchased in this area. I think it was again one of these things that happen by chance, that I didn't have to go very far to do a lot to induce someone to sell land in this area. In fact, there was some land that was being actively offered for sale and was in the hands of a real estate agent. It had been for some time.

I don't remember now the exact mechanics of how that happened with this land. I didn't go to every real estate agent, but it wasn't too long after a decision was made about finding some opportunity in this area to purchase that we became actively engaged in discussions and negotiations to acquire what was then known as the Heid Ranch. Fred Heid's first year on that property was 1928, the year that I was born, and they made wine. Afterwards he gave me his little notebook--a kind of cellar journal--describing the wines that they had made in each of the years. The first entry in that journal was in 1928, so it was kind of a touching coincidence.

They made the wine from that property. That would have implied that there must have been grapes there planted before. I'm not sure we ever talked about that. That's an interesting point: who actually planted those grapes? Since they came on the property in 1928 and made their first wine, the grapes had to have been there. When we purchased the land, they were Petite Sirah and Alicante Bouschet--Petite Sirah, which is said to be Durif, from the hillside vineyard, and Alicante Bouschet from the lower vineyard near the creek, the two extreme ends of the cultivatable land.

- Teiser: The Alicante would have been planted during Prohibition, probably. Alicante was a good shipping grape.
- Winiarski: Right. For shipment. It's a large berry. Is it a fairly tough-skinned berry?
- Teiser: Yes, it's got tough skin and lots of color. It shipped well.
- Winiarski: I know that variety was coming into the Chicago market, because I saw it arriving sometime when we still lived in Chicago--I went to the market where food came in from California--for Italian winemakers who used Alicante for part of the blend. That may have explained why it was planted along with Sirah. Maybe both were shipped. Sirah has wonderful color, a deep color. I'm not sure about the stability of Bouschet's color, but Sirah has deep and stable color.
- Teiser: The story was that the Italians in the East liked it because they could get lots of colored wine from it.
- Winiarski: Was it a stable color?
- Teiser: Yes, and they could add water and still have color. [laughter]
- Winiarski: I know they blended, because I saw some of them looking at grapes, pinching the grapes, and sizing up what was available. In these lugs coming in--I think they were called "L.A. lugs," twenty-eight-pound paper-backed lugs--they would not buy a single variety; they bought a number of different varieties. I chatted with some of them, and they said they always put together a number of varieties for different purposes to acquire a different character into the final wine. A little bit of this, a little bit of that, a little bit of something else--that was their approach to it, and always dependent on the fruit quality also. Some of it would not have shipped as well for some particular reason, so if the grapes were more shriveled they would have bought less of this and more of something else. All those kinds of practical considerations weighed very heavily when they were making their blends--not only what they would have liked to have done from an artistic point of view or from an end-quality point of view, but also what happened to be not so good in its arrival conditions.
- Teiser: I guess those are compromises that are always made.
- Winiarski: A similar kind of thing of course happens in France. They made their original plantings not so much from any artistic point of view or end product point of view, but from the point of view of what would ripen in some years and wouldn't ripen in other

years. As farmers, they are always thinking about a crop--having crop in some year. Some of it would get wiped out by the frost because it was earlier--for example, Merlot. Some of it wouldn't ripen in the fall because it would be decimated by fall rains. So they were always striking these compromises as well with what they planted. Lots of people think the planting decisions were made on the basis of their wine character, and that's only partly true. To a large extent it was farming considerations that dictated what they would plant.

The choice of this land, however, was guided simply by the consideration of the wine quality that I had tasted from Nathan Fay.

Teiser: Was Fred Heid a good winemaker?

Winiarski: His wines were not bad. They were palatable, and some of them were quite agreeable but in a rustic style.

Replanting the Vineyards, 1970-1972

Winiarski: We pulled out the Alicante, and we pulled out ten acres of prunes for the first year. We left the Petite Sirah on the hillside for one more year, and eventually that was pulled out also. We planted Cabernet and Merlot. The Merlot was the first in the southern part of the Napa Valley--the first in what is now Stag's Leap District. The first ten-acre block was two-thirds Cabernet and one-third Merlot. That was the least favorable soil, where we planted the Merlot. I had the impression somehow that the best Merlot in France was planted on rocky soil. That was misinformation. Specifically we are talking about vineyards that have a higher clay content than I was led to believe. But we did plant it, and it turned out to be a good decision. It had the same conditions as clay soil on the root limitations so that it would not be very vigorous, and it would not tend to delay its vegetative cycle. Where we planted it, in fact, the rockiness of that area contributed to the same end product. In other words, we didn't have very great root development, we didn't have very vigorous vines, and the two conditions, although they are not the same, contributed to the same end--a shorter vegetative cycle and more rapid ripening at the end of the season.

Teiser: I should bring this up in connection with current necessity to replant.



Julia, Stephen, and Kasia Winiarski tying young vines, 1973.

Winiarski: Due to phylloxera?

Teiser: Yes.

Winiarski: Fortunately we don't have that situation there. But it's still a consideration.

It's quite interesting that the considerations then that led me to plant those two varieties, and in the places where I planted them, have changed a little bit. We're still looking for quality fruit, but the way to the quality fruit is a little bit different now. Not only spacing, an important consideration, but rootstock--we would make different decisions today than we made in 1970. We know a little bit more. We're still interested in quality fruit; tonnage is not the objective. But the way to that objective is seen differently now than it was.

Teiser: Did you plant rooted cuttings?

Winiarski: We planted rooted cuttings of St. George.

Teiser: Where did you get them?

Winiarski: I think we got them mainly from Frank Emmolo that first year, a nurseryman here in the valley.

Teiser: And they worked?

Winiarski: They worked.

Teiser: You're lucky now.

Winiarski: Right. St. George is not the best, but from the point of view of phylloxera it was certainly the decision to make. The second planting was put in in 1971, the year after. I think we replanted everything. There was a small part that we didn't plant in 1971, and that was done in '72, so within those three years we replanted the whole thirty-five acres.

Teiser: That was a big gamble you were taking, wasn't it, starting with new vines?

Winiarski: Well, I had Nathan's experience. It was less of a gamble than he took, because we knew how the grapes had turned out for him. This is now a time in the valley when planting is taking place at a fairly rapid rate, and I wanted to be in on that ground floor with our development so as not to get behind the curve, so to speak, of the things that were taking place. So we did

want to plant as rapidly as possible. This was done with investors, and they were interested in getting it done as rapidly as possible. They were not patrons; they were investors. They were interested in what I wanted to do, but they wanted to see a return on it also. They were friendly investors, but they were investors; they were people who wanted to get some benefit from their investment.

Teiser: That's a good mix.

Winiarski: Well, it was, I think. Do you remember when this Bank of America report came out in the seventies that was so influential?

Teiser: Yes. [Bank of America, *California Wine Outlook*, September 1973].

Winiarski: That actuated a number of things that were happening in the past. For example, there was a scientific component to this revolution, this development that took place. There were the scientific aspects of it, there were the economic aspects, and there were the human resource aspects. All three of them had to come together in those early days, in the late sixties and early seventies, in order for this tremendous enlargement of the scope of California winemaking to take place. You had to have all that patient scientific work that took place in the past--that all made a contribution, all the giants of the "golden days"--whose work was so important to the progress of the science. All the development that was taking place needed to have been done already and waiting. Secondly, you needed to have people who were interested, who wanted to be part of the new development. They had the idea that maybe the California wine industry was entering upon a new age. They understood that it took the human resources to organize the whole process.

Then you had to have people who were interested in "banking," in funding and in risking an investment opportunity to support those other two aspects. But you had to have the human resources to organize all that, the craftsman-entrepreneur--in which category I would count my own position there. I had an aesthetic interest and an artistic interest to make those kinds of wines, but I evidently had acquired enough organizing ability to put those other two components together--the scientific winemaking and grape growing disciplines on the one hand and the financial-economic investment people on the other hand. It couldn't have been done on the old scale, because it took people with a fresh vision to do that. I remember discussions with some of the old-timers about the day

when they thought varietal grapes would be nothing but a passing fancy, would be out, and we would return to "standards." I couldn't see this for anything.

I had discussions along these lines with a number of people, just to confirm the absence of reality to their own thinking. We were never turning back to growing standards. That's not what the land was capable of, and the land would naturally, I thought, move to its highest capability, which was not growing standard grapes and common grapes--the Zins, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Alicante Bouschet. This was not going to be what this land was used for. I could see that.

So it took someone to see that. It took someone to see what potential there was, someone, as I think I said, whose taste was formed on the outside of this valley, whose aspiration gave impetus to putting together the other things that were out there, building on the work of the scientific giants, as I call them, and utilizing all the advances that had been made at Davis and at Fresno State in the whole scientific discipline.

Teiser: What did the Bank of America report do? There was also a Wells Fargo one that was similar.

Winiarski: Was there? I don't remember that.

Teiser: Very similar.

Winiarski: Now that you mention it, I do remember others supporting that original one. I knew of it as the Bank of America [report] because it had such a powerful impact. It showed that this tendency was not only local but worldwide. There was an interest in high, non-commodity type wines. At the same time that this was taking place, there was a continuing replacement of the dessert wine consumption with dry wine. That was not only in California but was a widespread phenomenon in Australia and in other places around the world. Dessert/fortified wine was losing, but table wine was gaining.

Among the table wines, specialty, non-commodity type wines seemed to have the brightest promise. There was a strong interest, whether it was due to the war, as some people say, with people getting experience of drinking wine as a mealtime beverage, or whether there were other factors. You can't believe that all over the world the same thing was happening. You think it's in the air, people breathe it, and then they're infected with it. But it seemed to be a very broad phenomenon,

and it seemed to have a very powerful demand support from consumers.

I think that's what the Bank of America report identified. It identified where those tendencies were leading, and one could make certain reasonable conclusions based on that. I think that gave a very strong feeling of confidence to investors that this was something that would repay their risks; so they ventured. So all of this came together, the people--the human resources--the science, and the economic capability. There was this kind of investment, and one didn't want to be behind in what was happening.

Our investors certainly were aware. I certainly used the Bank of America report to reassure investors that this wasn't a kind of an idle dream and that it had a reasonable certainty, if it was done well, of being successful and that their economic expectations would be fulfilled.

Teiser: I think others' expectations were too high sometimes so that there was a drop afterwards. Wasn't there a world price drop in about--

Winiarski: Seventy-four.

Teiser: But then the market recovered. Did that drop bother you?

Winiarski: No, because at that time we had started the winery. I'm just talking about the vineyard here; [we had] a separate set of partners. By that time we had set up the winery, and we had made a sweetheart arrangement between the winery and the vineyard; the vineyard grapes were committed to the winery. Since I was general partner of both the vineyard and the winery, and some of the ownership was duplicated in both organizations, this made it a very good arrangement between the various parts.

But I think you're right; there were some disappointments for one reason or another. There were a lot of "ifs." The fact that it was a very favorable time didn't guarantee that everything would be done well and would prosper.

Developing a Wine Estate

Teiser: Had you always intended to follow your vineyard purchases with a winery?

Winiarski: That's a very good point. I think that was always an aspiration, but it awaited the opportunity. I don't think you could even say that it was a conscious and deliberate plan that steps would follow. I think you could say it was always a potential, always something like a possibility, but it required putting together a number of things that I could not count on being put together.

Teiser: When did you decide to go ahead and build a winery?

Winiarski: Actually, that was another thing that happened by chance. I think I was still working for Ivancie, and somehow the connection was made between Ivancie and the source of grapes and the Martini planting on Zinfandel [Lane], which was Cabernet. So acting as a consultant or an agent for Ivancie, I visited the Martini ranch on Zinfandel Lane and made contact with someone who was representing the Martinis for some of their real estate. That was the person who happened to own the house at the top of the hill, the house [belonging to the Winiarskis] that you visited last time.

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Winiarski: So, Ruth, this was one of those chanceful things, because this person, Marian Backus, who represented the Martinis, lived in the house at the top of the hill, the Tommy Parker summer house. This hill that we're on is called Parker Hill on the maps. Tommy's family was one of the original pioneers in this whole area. Tommy Parker's father built the house in 1910 at the top of the hill as a summer house to catch the cool breezes from the bay. When the valley was hot, they thought that was a good spot.

I took Barbara with me on this visit where I had to discuss something about the Martinis with Marian Backus at her home, and we fell instantly in love with the house.

Teiser: It's a delightful house.

Winiarski: It wasn't quite what you saw; it was a little bit different, but still we loved everything about it. So I think the whole idea--and the house was sitting on thirty acres. Marian happened to mention that the house was for sale. This house is less than a mile from the vineyard. And there were thirty acres with the house. This is one of the chanceful circumstances. We fell in love with it, and by this time we were thinking that we had always rented, and it was time to buy a house; it was time to live in a house for our family. We wanted to be out of the "fatigue of need" that had gone on

since we were in the valley. The whole venture since we moved from Chicago was now time to be remedied or at least thought about. The presence of the house, the fact that they had land, and the possibility of purchasing it--.

When I came back the next day to talk about it some more, I misunderstood something that David Backus had told me. I misunderstood by a wide margin the amount that he thought he needed to sell the house. The original dream about a misunderstood number transformed itself from something that we might do ourselves on the basis of a misunderstood number to something that we could only do with others. So the idea of making a chateau for winery purposes came to be, since its location, its suitability, and everything suggested that we could make this work. The idea of buying the house would only work if we could buy the house as an adjunct to a winery, an enterprise that would be started on the property. We really wanted the property. The winery needed the property, our family needed the house, and we thought there was some synergy there and that maybe the two could work together.

Teiser: And you managed?

Winiarski: That was the thing that was managed. But at first it was entirely chance. As it turned out, it's a wonderful place for entertaining winery guests, and it was then. It was very useful for the partnership while we were a partnership. But that's how it started; it started with this effort to bring together our need for a house and the need for the establishment of the winery for purposes of utilizing the fruit that was so close, and the whole estate concept was created.

Teiser: How many partners did you have?

Winiarski: We had eight other partners in the beginning, some of whom, as I said, were in the vineyard and remain in the vineyard. Some were brought in through their acquaintance with the original vineyard partners, and some of them were new. Are you talking about the vineyard or the winery?

Teiser: Both.

Winiarski: Well, there were eight partners, and then we brought in another for the vineyard.

Teiser: When was it that you made your decision to go ahead and have a winery?

Winiarski: I don't remember. [laughter] It just happened. Maybe it happened on the circumstances of the house. It's like if you have a dog, you have the other things--the leash and so forth. [laughter]

Teiser: When did you actually start planning the building of a winery?

Winiarski: The first thing was to close the purchase for the thirty acres and the house. That was dependent on finding water, because this is a very poor area for water. The idea of the winery and the house together on this site had already been put together, and we needed water. We needed more water than had been available for domestic purposes, so we couldn't close without demonstrating that there was adequate water to operate a winery. We drilled while our escrow period was in effect. We drilled many holes. We never found the water on the property, but we decided to bring water over from the vineyard property, which was closer, as a way to accommodate the winery need.

I think the idea had already been formulated of putting together the house site and its acreage for winery use, but where it would be located, where it would be built, and how it would be built we didn't decide until we got together with some of the prospective partners.

Teiser: When was the winery built, then?

Winiarski: The winery was built in '73. The negotiations were concluded in '72, and we thought we might use part of the house premises. It's a building on three stories because it's built on the hillside, so the bottom area was capable of being used. Indeed, we had that bonded. For the first year we used the winery house for our wine aging program. We brought in barrels and used that for wine aging.

Gradually we moved out of that space when we built the winery building in '73 and used that space for case storage.

Building and Equipping the Winery, 1973

Teiser: Did you yourself design the winery?

Winiarski: Yes.

Teiser: By then you knew--

Winiarski: Well, it's a simple building, as you can see. It's a vernacular kind of architecture, so it didn't take--. We had a local engineer help us with the engineering, and between Barbara's and my concepts of what a winery should look like--a simple building, vernacular style--it was born in that simplistic way. It didn't have an architect as such.,

Teiser: How about equipment?

Winiarski: I knew enough about the equipment; that was my business then. All that was designed and scrounged from used equipment in the beginning. We were thinking about a very conservative approach, so wherever we could, we got used equipment, things that had already been around and were no longer in active service. We managed to moderate our capital requirements by using a great deal of used equipment.

Teiser: Has that stood up?

Winiarski: Yes, but that's all changed now. I don't know what we have of the original equipment except the tanks. The original presses are gone. I think we may have some of the original pumps, but in general all of these things were very useful in the beginning. The lift is still in operation. Some of its original structure is still useful, but the actual lifting mechanism we have replaced and that sort of thing. Even the tanks--you know, the famous "Cask 23" that we sell? We got this wooden cask from Inglenook. They were disposing of some casks, and we renovated them inside and out. Guy Kay, who was at Beringer, helped us move some of the casks one afternoon. A forklift from Beringer was brought down--

Teiser: What kind of tanks were they?

Winiarski: Wooden. They were wooden ovals, and they have been replaced. But the original Cask 23, the inspiration for the name, came from the fact that in the lineup of tanks that we had, that was number 23.

It was very cooperative; it wasn't as competitive in those days. People helped each other quite a lot. They had the time to do that. You remember that there may have been twenty or thirty wineries in the valley. Freemark Abbey was to a large extent a model for a four-hundred-ton crushing operation. Chuck [Charles S.] Carpy was of assistance. We visited other wineries to see what they were doing. We had a very generous outlay of time and consideration from other winemakers. All of these things were very helpful. It could not have been done without it. I think we visited almost every small winery to

see exactly how arrangements, dispositions--when you have to do it for yourself, you take a very careful look. Even though I had been a consultant, I had never built a winery before. I had never arranged flow of material for maximum efficiency on my own, and this was all important to see what other people had done, how they had solved these very basic problems. This was very helpful.

Teiser: You were speaking earlier about a sense of community in your childhood home. Did you find a similar sense of community here?

Winiarski: Right, restricted not to social aspects but simply the willingness to share experiences and thoughts about how one did things. That community spirit was there; people were very willing and anxious, excited even, not for their own behalf but on your behalf. They were excited for the things that you were doing, so they very freely shared their experiences and their own thoughts with me. So that sense of community in that respect was there.

Teiser: Chuck Carpy, I gather, has been an important part of this valley in his influence. Is that right?

Winiarski: I remember that when I was still at Mondavi, Mondavi had some wines that they stored at Freemark Abbey. Going over to work on these wines gave me the opportunity to become better acquainted with Chuck. We had also struck up an acquaintance because we both were part of the drive to introduce the agricultural preserve ordinance in the valley back in 1968. When I would go over there, we would have a chance to chat about this and that kind of thing. Since he had overseen in large part the refurbishing, the reestablishment of Freemark Abbey, his experiences were very valuable as examples of kinds of things to think about and do. Chuck is the kind of man who thinks a great deal about what he does, and his grasp of detail was very strong. His knowledge of why things were done the way they were done was very useful and helpful. If the world is divided into two kinds of people, those who think about everything and those who think about nothing, he was the kind of person who thought about everything. [laughter]

So that would take us up to 1973, when we built the winery.

Teiser: Had you been making wine in someone else's premises?

Winiarski: We made it in '72 at Oakville, at the old [Wilfred] van Loben Sels operation at that time. We crushed the grapes there, and

we brought them back, I think, before the end of the year and put them in our barrels in the ground floor of the house, and we aged the wine there. So they were all here. We had bonded that premise; part of that house was a bonded winery at one time. The use we made of the house for these purposes probably repaid a good portion of the partners' original investment.

Teiser: What was your first production in your own winery?

Winiarski: That was in 1973. The 1972 crop from the vineyard was the first crop. It wasn't commercially very significant, and the second crop, 1973, was the wine that went to the Paris tasting in 1976.

Teiser: Oh, really? First time around!

Winiarski: Yes, first time around. That dedicated the building, you might say; that was the first crush of the building.

Teiser: That certainly got it off to a good start.

Winiarski: Couldn't have been better, could it?

Teiser: The wines that you were concentrating upon then were Cabernet and--

Winiarski: Cabernet and Merlot here. We very generously got some help from Robert Mondavi in Riesling that year. In 1974 we did start to crush our own Riesling. We were able to buy some crushed juice, unfermented juice, from Robert Mondavi that year to add to it. So this was a help to be able to do that, to be able to get somewhat larger production. Seventy-four, if you recall, was a very warm harvest, and the grapes tended to come in all at once. So it was very good that we could expand the capacity of our own operation by Robert Mondavi giving access to some of the fruit from his own harvest for us to take over as juice and to ferment here.

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Winiarski: I think it's an interesting point that the composition of the farming, the type of farming that was being done by the Heids before we pulled out--. They were not bound to a single crop when they farmed that land. I guess that was important, that they not only had the grapes, but they had prunes, apples, and cherries in this small acreage. While they were not quite subsistence farmers--I mean, they obviously didn't subsist on those prunes and the cherries--they wanted to make cash. But I think a characteristic of quite a few of the lands that are now

in vineyards in this valley were before not mono-cultured; they were not single-crop enterprises.

Teiser: There were a lot of prunes and apples planted at Prohibition.

Winiarski: Correct. And even the olives were put in the hills, not during Prohibition but when phylloxera began to devastate the vineyards. This was when the olives were put in, because no one was certain, I believe, at that time that rootstock would not eventually itself also succumb to phylloxera. This was an element of uncertainty, and olives were seen as an alternate to grapes because of the phylloxera.

In any case, most of the smaller properties, and even some of the larger, like the Trefethen property, which was considerably larger, were not single-crop enterprises. They had a number of different crops that they relied on for sales. So it was a little bit different. Prunes may have been dominant, and I think that wasn't always so; they became dominant simply because there was more security about having some cash return from that. In general, I think people spread the risk and did not have a single crop that they relied on. It was not until grapes became such a powerful dominant economic factor that such single-purpose agriculture took the place of a more variegated agricultural endeavor.

I think that's an important point. It may also have had something to do with the way this valley developed. The successive waves of immigrants from different kinds of backgrounds might have contributed to that to some extent. The Italians didn't come in until later. The first people--the Beringers, the Younts, the Krugs, the Carpys, Schram--were more or less the first wave of people. There may have been even a wave earlier than that--ranching, grazing, and that sort of thing--when agriculture became dominant. It was not the Italians; they came in later.

So first of all you had the Germans, then the Italians, and then there was Prohibition. Then you have this recent wave of people who come from all over. There are even some Polish people in this group. [laughter] People like Jack Davies and the Carpys take over an earlier tradition. But if the new people were not part of that continuity of that old Italian tradition--Martinis, Mondavis, and so on--you have people who come in whose families have been in this country for some time and are relocating themselves.

Sometime, Ruth, you are going to write another book, which will have to do with the motivations and the thoughts of the people who came in here in this valley and succeeded each other. I think you will find that those motivations were quite different. They were not refugees, so to speak. There may have been a different kind of aspiration that guided all of the different kinds of people who came here at different times. It might be something interesting.

Anyway, I think the observation is at least of more than passing interest that the successive waves were differently structured in terms of their backgrounds and their national origin. They contributed in different ways and were guided by different stars. I think one could say that.

Teiser: There was the gentleman farmer and the gentleman vintner tradition, and it's longstanding in Europe, too. Does that fit into what you are just saying?

Winiarski: I look over this list, and I think of when the Heid brothers came here, and I don't see any gentlemen farmers until very recently--people whose wealth originated elsewhere who wanted to establish themselves in grape growing and winemaking. Looking at this list: Krug, Beringer, Yount, Schram, the Italians who came in--all of these were people who were active either in grape growing or winemaking or in other professions.¹

Teiser: Ernest Wente told me that the Wentes complained because they were in one of the few businesses that had amateurs as competitors, because there were a number in the Livermore area.

Winiarski: I think that's certainly true today, if by amateurs one means a person whose motivating aspirations come not from merely professional discipline but from the heart (which is the original meaning of the term). The acquisition of the professional skills might even be secondary to supply a means of supporting that aspiration.

Teiser: You mentioned Trefethen, for instance. He was typical, I think.

Winiarski: Yes, whose background was not professional in any way.

¹Schram was a barber, Beringer an experienced winemaker, Yount a workman-of-all-trades, Krug a political activist and journalist who did a number of other things before he became a winemaker.

Today I think it's even more difficult--it's very difficult for someone to duplicate what I did, to start from scratch with the investors. I think that would be really tough to duplicate.

Teiser: Chappelet was in the food vending business.

Winiarski: Business success elsewhere in another kind of business. This kind of resource-rich endeavor I don't think is characteristic of any of the people that we talked about before historically.

Teiser: You were lucky.

Winiarski: No question. That's why I want to point out these things. So much depended on chance circumstances. The availability, the putting together of various things depended so much on things that you could not have ever calculated would be there as opportunities even.

Teiser: Well, you recognized them.

Winiarski: Maybe there's something to that.

Sam Aaron [distinguished wine merchant and connoisseur of New York City] once told me, after the Paris tasting, that in the Paris tasting we were struck by lightning. That's certainly true. This was a tremendously energizing event, circumstance, and happening. However, we did climb to the top of the tree, or the top of the hill, in order to be exposed to the possibility of being struck by lightning. One could also say that.

Teiser: Was it Grgich who also scored well in that Paris tasting?

Winiarski: Yes.

Teiser: That's helped him, too.

Winiarski: It certainly has.

Teiser: We're back at your first fermentation.

Winiarski: I also wanted to mention about Merlot, because one sort of assumes Merlot is also always around, and one should not take that for granted, either. Outside of Sterling and I think Martini, I don't know another grower in the valley who chose to put in Merlot at the time that we did, back in 1970. I chose our bud wood with very great care. I went out to the Delta to get it on a planting that doesn't exist any more. It's been

very good. As a matter of fact, when the success of this Merlot was recognized because it cropped well, was free of virus, and produced outstanding fruit, we probably realized more from selling cuttings than we did from the grapes themselves. [laughs]

So the Merlot was a matter of choice, as I said, but there were chance elements as well. I was looking to restrict the vegetative aspects of it and to make it less vigorous--to find a less vigorous site. The fact that it turned out so very well there, that it produced and had a good crop very consistently from year to year, and that it turned out to make very good wine was an important step in the development of the use of Merlot in this valley.

Teiser: Were you your own winemaker?

Winiarski: Yes. That's interesting. Why did you ask that question?

Teiser: Most entrepreneurs quickly get themselves a winemaker.

Winiarski: No, this was my skill *and* my love, so I combined the expert and the amateur. I came to the whole thing through production, which is a little bit different from the way of coming to it which others followed. Learning, having undergone this apprenticeship--

Teiser: I suppose some people expect to be their own winemakers but find the other aspects of the business absorb them too much.

Winiarski: I think this may be a little bit more true when you get larger, then you get a conflict for your time. Winemaking could be considered the head part and the hand part, and gradually you have to do more of the head part--thinking through the steps and developing the means to achieve the ends that you wish for the wines that you are looking to produce. Then someone else could actually do the body parts. So as a winemaker you could become somewhat disembodied. That is, you don't actually use your muscles to move those barrels, but you decide what barrels you want to use, when you want to fill the barrels, how long the wine will remain in the barrels, and somebody else does the body part of it. Maybe it's still important that you smell quite a few of the bungs, but maybe not every bung. Maybe you don't do all the topping; someone else does. All of this is winemaking, and somehow the head part of it or the thinking part of it gets severed from the body part. So here we are walking around like heads without bodies. [laughter]

Teiser: As your winery developed, did you relinquish some of the duties to others?

Winiarski: Yes. The executing functions are now delegated. So long as I have complete confidence that goals I am looking to achieve are very well understood by someone else, I can even leave some of the means to accomplish those goals. I don't have to be present at every day-by-moment decision. Someone else can do those things, so long as they're clear about the objectives. So it's very important that we get the confidence, the tasting: What would you do? How much of this would you put in to make it get like that? It's important that I know this, and it's important that I have confidence that someone who is making those decisions knows where I want to go also. That part of winemaking--the understanding of how to get to where you want the wine to be, what you want it to be, how you want to give it its opportunity to express to the fullest its nature of that year--the means to do that: How much do you squeeze it? How much do you not squeeze it? How much do you let it alone? When do you let it alone? All these things you have to know or someone has to know. You can't make wine without knowing those things, but eventually someone else could actually do it, as long as they know what has to be done.

Teiser: Who tastes here?

Winiarski: We all taste. The most important tools in this winery are the palate and the nose. Everything else is subordinate to that. So we're always tasting, and I'm always part of the tasting. How much oak, how little oak, rackings--all these sort of things we're tasting, and everyone tastes together. As a matter of fact, when we taste in company for purposes of deciding on where we stand with respect to the rest of the industry and with people we consider our peers, we try to get someone else in so that we are not too much bound by our own ingrown preferences. This is very good, to get the shock of someone who might not experience the same qualities as you do; so this corrective is very important, and we try to do that.

Teiser: I'm always interested when I'm in a winemaker's office, and I look at what wines they are tasting against. I see that you have Joseph Heitz's Cabernet over there. Who shops for wines to taste against?

Winiarski: Well, it's done in different ways. Sometimes people say we ought to be tasting these wines with ours, that we ought to be tasting what's new. So we put together tastings, and sometimes they originate them. Sometimes I say, "We have to taste so-and-so. I've heard about this, or I've tasted that." That's



Warren Winiarski delivering remarks on wine at an international meeting at the House of Commons, 1978.

very important to continually do so that these little shifts in stylistic objectives are sensed. Sometimes the tools are elaborated so that you can achieve an objective which the technology of yesterday didn't allow you to achieve. It's important that this sense of movement and opportunity is not ignored.

I just came back, Ruth, from tasting seventy-six-odd 1970 vintage of Bordeaux in Florida. It was a very valuable tasting. Robert Paul, a collector and connoisseur in Florida, put on this tasting for a number of us. They had some of the French producers of the wines there and English tasters-- Michael Broadbent, Clive Coates, and people like that. The winemaker and owner of the Chateau Pichon-Longueville was there, also from Figeac and Pavie. There was a wide variety of people who are talking about the wines and appreciating the wines, and this is very important also to get the sense of the long term, what's happening to the wines after twenty years.

Some wines are merely recollections of what they were in the past. They're not even pleasant. The English tend to like some of these wines with more aged characteristics more than we do. We tend to like the fruitier, more robust wines, and they tend to like the more attenuated wines, so it is a difference of opinion.

We are able to taste wines of that age and with that range from different regions--from Pommereh, Saint-Estephe, Pauillac, and other different regions--to see how they age, knowing something about the technology that produced them and having the producers there to speak about all these issues, each one liberated from what might be an excessive preoccupation with one's own kind of endeavor. It's important also to have a sense not only of where you are going and what you'd like to accomplish but what others are doing and how this fits into a wider horizon of wine. Your own preoccupations might give you the temptation to suspect that you are only concerned with your own, and therefore you don't see that larger context. Since we're interested in producing world-class wines, it's important to see what is that whole class out there; what is that larger class, and what happens to those wines after twenty years.

Teiser: Do you consider California wines to be on what they call these days "a level playing field" with French wines?

Winiarski: Some of this I address in that article, "The Hierarchy of Wine Quality." I try to make a distinction there between regional wines and classical wines or wines that transcend merely regional excellence. I think we have the opportunity in

California to achieve, and I think in that Paris tasting (we can talk about that later a little more schematically) we showed that we were capable of transcending our regional limitations, and we could produce wines that are good any place and every place, any time and every time, simply because they embody these classical characteristics and are not simply good because they represent a region.

The Paris Tasting, 1976##

Teiser: Is this a good time to talk about the Paris tasting?

Winiarski: This is a perfect time to talk about it.

Teiser: The Paris tasting was developed by Steven Spurrier. How did you get into it?

Winiarski: Steven had a restaurant and a school--I think it was primarily a school, but he also had a restaurant--in Paris. The objective of the school was to train people in the trade about the wines of France primarily. He had a staff of people, one of whom was an American named Patricia Gallagher. For some reason she was given the job of coming to California and seeing what we were up to for a purpose that I think Steven originally conceived would be some kind of celebration of the Bicentennial--some kind of recognition, some kind of event which would embody a recognition of the fact that the French had helped us in our revolutionary war, and we wanted to express our gratitude or recognition of that by some kind of event that he would participate in. I think he had in mind that it would give the French a sense of what we, borrowing the grape types and some of the technology, had brought to the New World from Europe and from France in particular.

That was the kind of idea, I think, in the beginning. Then it modified itself over the course of time to become a little bit different. I don't think it was ever conceived as a beauty contest as such, where there was one winner and all the rest were losers. It was a comparison and meant for observation and to show some of the wines of the New World. Patricia came over to find out whose wines they might be. She was helped in this I think a little bit by Bob [Robert] Finigan, who pointed her in certain directions and said, "You might be interested in these wines and those wines," and she



In cellar, barrels of wine that won Paris Tasting of 1976.

came around and visited the wineries that he indicated might be of interest.

She visited here, tasted our wines, and she tasted the wines of others. She must have said back--I'm just guessing about this--"Steven, you have to come out here yourself, because some of these wines are of great interest. You should come out and make your evaluations." In any case, he did come out after she did. She made a certain preliminary list of wines to be taken over for this event, and he came out then and also did the same thing.

Our wines were among those chosen to be in this demonstration, and they were carried over as hand luggage by a group that was going over to visit the chateaux in France, to make a visit throughout the French vineyards. The wines were deposited with Steven in his school and were then placed in the Hotel Intercontinental for that particular day that the tasting was to take place. They were tasted blind, and they were judged by the assembled persons, whose skill was very great in discriminating between wines. They were all French and were among the very top people whose abilities in tasting wines were equalled by few others. They had recognition and reputations to match their powers. They tasted and compared California Cabernets and Bordeaux wines of classified, even first growth origins. They also tasted and compared California Chardonnays and the white wines of Burgundy. It was later reported that several of them had felt it would be very easy to distinguish between the French and the California wines.

As a result of the tasting, our Cabernet of 1973 and the 1973 Chardonnay of Chateau Montelena were found to be worthy of comparison with those outstanding wines--not only worthy to be compared but, on that particular occasion, preferred.

Teiser: Yes, I was astounded when I read of it.

Winiarski: It certainly had far-reaching implications for us personally, for our endeavor, and I think it had certain implications for California and for the Napa Valley. It was a kind of consummation for my notion that the California grapes had potential which was not being expressed or was not being exploited; we were not doing the best we could with California fruit.

I think if you look at the results and try to understand what was really important, it was not that our wine or Montelena's wine was chosen above some French wines. That was very gratifying, pleasant, competitively significant, and all

these things, but the fact that the tasters could not systematically separate our wines from their wines meant that we had achieved a certain classic character. Our wines were not good because they were ours; they were good because they could stand in the company of wines which had come to be identified with those that embodied characteristics good every place and always, not only because they represented this region but because they had these characteristic virtues that lifted them in category, in type, in being. They were styled in a classic way. From this point of view, it is of the utmost significance and also, by the way, deliciously ironic, that the French tasters thought, when making their judgments known, that they were tasting and preferring their own French wines; i.e., they thought our '73 Cabernet and the Chardonnay from Montelena were from France! This was reported by various people who were there and who overheard the comments which were made.

Classic Criteria

Winiarski: That's the point I guess I try to make in this article ["The Hierarchy of Wine Quality"], that there are certain wines which are regional, and their excellence is understood as an expression of the region, and that would have been the wines that many people in California were trying to make then which were wines that had very rich, very powerful, very ripe fruit characteristics, and possessed great abundance of varietal character. There are also some others that we didn't often make then, which possessed the characteristic of "restraint," which I call the third "r." There are two "r's," "richness" and "ripeness," and there's another one which might be called "restraint" or moderation, and my goal with the 1973 fruit was to give it this quality of moderation. The Paris Tasting showed what California grapes, with all their richness and ripeness, could attain if the wines also were styled to embody a certain restraint. These would not be wines noted for the most massive expression of ripe fruit but would be wines expressing our regional abundance, *balanced* by moderation and restraint. That is to say that the level of fruit character would be moderated to the point required for a wine to qualify for the name "classic."

Teiser: It's interesting that there was a consensus among the tasters. How does it happen that such a thing exists, that some kind of ideal is understood by a number of different people?

Winiarski: When you get to these very fine points, I don't think there's very much disagreement about what is superior. I mean, there might be preferential differences, but if you look at the judging that takes place at some of these olympic contests, you don't find one judge who gives a 2 and another one who gives a 9.5; they are within a narrow band of disagreement. I think when you get to such embodiments of excellence, even though there might be certain conventional aspects to what you judge as good and not good, there is less of a disagreement among people who are competent about what constitutes excellence in any given field. There was a range, surely, and accident and chance play a part, and preference plays a part, but within that range I think there is less difference. People generally have a band within which they judge what is excellent and what is not.

I think the fact that they didn't throw the wines out on the first go, that they couldn't systematically tell the difference, means that the standards or the criteria of excellence are those by which those wines could be judged all together. I think that's the important part of the Paris tasting that doesn't get very much expressed. That's the implication, that we had achieved the quality level, and it was almost universally recognized within this group. In addition, it also recognized enough so that one could throw out as idiosyncratic those judgments in that group of judges which were not in accordance with that, that there is a standard for wines of this character, universal, classic, international standards, and that these standards can be used as guidance. For the most part, we were not merely regional wines; we were wines that embodied certain trans-regional characteristics, you might say "transcendent" characteristics--balance, harmony, euphonic relationship between the parts: the soft, smooth, fruity parts and the tannic, hard parts; there was a certain balance there. No predominance, no excessively forceful elements, a certain highlighting that takes place in the fruit, a certain complexity, a depth, a length, a persistence of flavors, no shortness, no interruptions, continuity between what you smell and what you taste--all these things are characteristics of wines that have these universal, or regional-transcending characteristics. I think for people who are experienced, these are not hard things to identify, and I think most of the California wines in that tasting were seen in that context.

I think this insight is very important, and I think our contribution to its illuminating power has been significant. I think it's important to recognize exactly what it was that happened there. It wasn't just a contest, it wasn't just

walking away with first prize; it was more than that. It implied something deeper, and I think that is a lesson that should be well understood.

I think that should guide us in the future also. To a certain extent we were dazzled by our own potential. The richness that our fruit was capable of was simply dazzling--the high alcohol, the powerful extractives, the tannin, the rich and powerful fruit, the heady aromas. All of these things are impressive in themselves, but they do tend to fatigue. You cannot have a wonderful aesthetic experience where you are at the edge of fatigue every moment, engrossed. So I think that element of restraint was very important, and it still is important.

These elements--the richness, the ripe fruit, the power, the expressive fruit, the opulence--are all means; they're not ends in themselves. We were preoccupied with the means and took them to be the end, and they never should have been the end. You had all these 14-percent-alcohol and highly extracted wines, these late-harvest Zinfandels, the Cabernets to end all Cabernets, the Chardonnays to end all Chardonnays. The most powerful, authoritative statement seemed to many to be a statement of beauty, but beauty doesn't need excess. On the contrary.

Look at this head [refers to picture of a sculpture of a Cycladic head from a human figure]. It refers to humanity in an abstract way. It's from the twenty-fourth century B.C. It is rather a minimal statement, a statement which still allows the engagement of the mind to take place, where the sensor or the experiencer is engaged in that. It doesn't have everything done; the sensual experience does not do everything in itself. I think that's a point we could start with next time, because I think I have a little elaboration on that point.

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Winiarski: [In response to a question about the name Stag's Leap, which became the name for the viticultural region] So there was no forethought to distinguish ourselves from anyone else. We knew there had been a Stag's Leap resort--Stag's Leap Manor, I think it was called--when we chose the name, but we didn't do it with any reference to what was to become a drawn-out legal conflict over the use of the name [first over the proprietary use of the name with the owner of Stag's Leap manor and later joined with that same owner over the form of the name to be used to designate a viticultural area].

Teiser: Has the name created any problems?

Winiarski: There is some consumer confusion. There still is, and there always will be, I expect, when two wineries use a name which is so uncommon. People think there is only one, and we still have the problem of separating our proprietary usage from the other proprietary usage. It might have been a problem with the appellation, the American viticulture area. I didn't approve of that effort and wasn't on board, so to speak, in the efforts to get this viticultural area until there was a clear understanding that we would try to separate proprietary use of the name from the geographic or viticultural use of the name. That came about when the application was modified so that it was for Stag's Leap District. The name was not simply the two words, "Stag's Leap," but "Stag's Leap District." I think that was a clear recognition that the effort should be made to apply for a name which would be clearly geographic in character and not proprietary.

"Wines of Moderation and Restraint"

Winiarski: I wonder whether we should see if we have everything stated about the last point, which I think is so important for California's future and mission, so to speak, and certainly how we perceived our effort in having a part in defining the fine winemakers' mission in California. I would state that as follows: we are trying to raise the aspiration of those people who are producing fine wines so that they would be concerned with identifying their own wines with what I called before the classic wines--the wines of the classic tradition, which means wines which do not simply express the regional excellence. What I thought we had to do was rise above our concern with expressing the power and the richness of our fruit and employ the virtues of moderation and restraint for expressing the fruit.

That's primarily what my objective was. I'll tell you a little story about that. It was never so clear to me that what we wanted to do was right as when I was at a marketing dinner early in our history; it may have been in '74 or so when we were first releasing our wines. I was down in southern California. We had an agent at that time in southern California who invited me to a dinner. At this dinner the wine that was served was a Late Harvest Zinfandel. Mind you, this wasn't a dessert course; this was a food course. Even today I remember the feeling: the first sip was okay, and I got the

sense of this huge, powerful wine that was with the food. Each sip afterward was like the anticipation of dread for what was going to happen to the mouth and what was going to happen to the food that I had just swallowed a little bit of.

The sense of "anticipating with dread" was like a revelation. I was thinking, "This is not what we should be doing with California grapes. We should not be making wines like this or anything near it for food." This was an assault on one's senses; this wine obliterated any sense of the food and was not in any way its companion. It demanded one's exclusive attention; it wiped out everything else. Such experiences were not what I thought was appropriate for dining. It was strongly reinforced for me that we were going in an entirely different and better direction.

Eventually, I think what the Paris tasting showed was that wines that aspired to be of classical character had to learn restraint and moderation, which is the major idea, I think, in what I brought to the Cabernet varietal at that time. I think the Paris tasting sort of sealed that. No longer were we interested in--the winemakers of California had the possibility of a new kind of goal, because they saw it was successful.

So I think the Paris Tasting was a kind of affirmation for us, and it was a big lesson to be learned for California from those tastings.

Growth and Special Programs

Teiser: You have told of building your first winery. Can you sketch the growth of the business since then?

Winiarski: A good bit of that was made far easier by the fact that the Paris tasting occurred. The partners were very satisfied, naturally. The telephone was a constant reminder that wines that we had difficulty placing before were now sought after. There was a good reason why people wanted to buy our wines, where we might have had difficulty persuading them before. Things became a bit easier, and that made the development of the winery and continued investment a far more reasonable prospect than before.

At some point, Ruth, the family enterprise--what was to be a more limited scope--shifted its focus, and we were no longer focused on a family enterprise at a lower level of economic

return, as we had been in the beginning. It became more businesslike, you might say; it became less personal and more rational, if that makes sense.

Teiser: What has Mrs. Winiarski's function been in the winery?

Winiarski: She has always concerned herself with the public aspect of it and the food aspect and with engaging the attention of those people who were important to the winery on a personal basis. She has written the release letters sometimes, and she has thought about how we were presenting words to the public. She has in all ways been my helper and comfort. What has been achieved over the years would not have been possible without her.

As I say, the buildings proceeded, and our overall economic goals changed. Eventually we bought out the partners' interest, so it became a completely family enterprise at a somewhat higher level of economic activity than we originally thought. We're finished with that development now. We have three children. If they wish to continue this, there is an opportunity. The basis is laid; it's large enough to occupy all of them. We are no longer dependent simply on the grapes from our own vineyard: we buy grapes from others. All of our white grapes from others.

In 1976 we started our Chardonnay program. It was small then but has developed much more extensively recently. We were pleased to be first among 350-some-odd white wines in a recent Beverage Tasting Institute competition with our '90 Chardonnay Reserve. So now we are about as well known for our Chardonnays and their stylistic character as well.

Teiser: You buy Chardonnay grapes, but your vinification is all here?

Winiarski: Yes, vinification is all here. Actually, the last building that we built [constructed in 1990] was for the purpose of improving the character of the Chardonnay wines in particular. We can ferment at cold temperatures in barrels, and we couldn't do that to any large extent in the existing buildings. That's one of the primary reasons for that last building, to give us the room to do that. Our Reserve Chardonnay program has received as many accolades as our Cask 23 [program]. We've certainly developed a technique. Starting in 1980, it took us about six years to develop the technique for Chardonnay, and we think we are, again, focusing on a restrained elegance while still being loyal to the regional characteristics. We don't see any reason why our Napa Valley regional characteristics for the wine should not establish a new kind of worldwide standard.



White wine production building completed in 1991.

For the type of regional characteristics we have, we think we can establish a model, classic type wine, still loyal to the regional characteristics but expressing classic character at the world-class level.

Teiser: What is your Cask 23 program?

Winiarski: Yes, you are right; we didn't talk about that. We take the most distinctive part of, up to now, the SLV vineyards, and we segregate that early in view of its excellence and its distinctiveness for a special bottling of the Cabernet, which we call Cask 23.¹ That wine is not made in every year; it's got to be a year of exceptional character. Eventually that finds its way to the market as a proprietary blend, Cask 23, under that name, which is then our reserve bottling of the Cabernet for that particular year.

There have been a number of years together where we haven't made it, in the early eighties, for example, but roughly every two and a half years we come out with a cask bottling. That usually is an immediate sellout. It's at roughly the same price level as the very finest California offerings of that varietal. It's sought after because it represents an exceptional blend from an exceptional year. Sometimes people ask us whether the year (or the vintage) is a Cask 23 year. They judge the quality of the whole vintage by whether or not we will be making a Cask 23. That is flattering but somewhat exaggerated.

The Vineyards

Teiser: Is it a single vineyard?

Winiarski: Up till now it has been a single vineyard. It has come from the Stag's Leap [SLV] vineyards. Since we bought the Fay vineyard adjoining, which is twice the size, we will have the opportunity, as that vineyard is replanted and comes into production, to source our material from a pool which is now two times larger than it was before. So we should have more supply and more opportunity, but it's still going to have the same

¹We started this proprietary blend, which was new for California, in 1974. I think it was the same year that Phelps made its first Insignia, also a proprietary blend. I can't remember if there were any others that early.

principle of exceptional quality from any given exceptional year.

Did we talk about the Fay vineyard? I think when you were up at the house last, you looked out over it.

Teiser: Yes, I think you spoke of it.

Winiarski: And the circumstances of how we came to that vineyard?

Teiser: Will you tell about it now?

Winiarski: I went down to Nathan about 1968, about this irrigation problem.

Teiser: Yes, you talked about that.

Winiarski: That's why we bought SLV, because I tasted Nathan's homemade wine. So that part of the story we know about. However, twenty years later we finally were able to buy that vineyard, which was the origin of the whole story, so to speak. Now it's being replanted, and the first vintage that uses grapes from the newly-planted vineyard will be '89. Thereafter we should have progressively more fruit from that vineyard.

Teiser: How many acres do you have all together planted now?

Winiarski: We have 35 and 70, so it's roughly 115 acres, 105 acres under cultivation in various stages.

Teiser: Do you have any plans for other varieties?

Winiarski: We have planted Petit Verdot in the Fay vineyard (also a first for our district and area), but our estate vineyards are meant to be just that; the grapes go into the SLV and the Fay and the Cask 23. We think that land is an exceptional place for a Cabernet vineyard or Cabernet type. I haven't really found Cabernet Franc which I like, so we have not put in any of that, but we might try a bit of it. The Fay vineyard is under a replanting program, and we have started now in SLV to pull out the first block we planted in '70, the first ten acres or so.

Teiser: Why are you pulling them out?

Winiarski: The vines in that block are a bit tired, and they've been cropping in an eight-by-twelve spacing, which was the original spacing. We're going to change that. It's not because of phylloxera, but we think we will improve the quality with this next generation.

Teiser: What spacing are you going to have?

Winiarski: We will probably put in a seven-by-five. That's roughly a third of the space per vine. We will make smaller vines, we will change the trellis, and we will put in a rootstock which will not give us the difficulty that we have had recently controlling the amount of vegetative vigor there is. We will concentrate more--and this is the last thing I actually wanted to talk to you about. But you had some other concerns--.

Consistent Goals

Teiser: I was going to ask you if your winemaking has been changed in any way or affected by consultants.

Winiarski: I would say it has not. This goal, this introduction of the classical considerations, has not been affected; I've kept to that goal. I've had people in to help me achieve it, but the goal itself has not changed. We're still looking to produce a wine that has these classical characteristics and at the same time is loyal to the soil and to the climate where these grapes are grown. So we want to express both of those things. That goal hasn't changed; that goal hasn't been modified.

André Tchelistcheff, whom I mentioned in our first meeting, was here for a while and was very helpful, very significant in helping us to flesh out those goals and to articulate those kinds of things I had to be thinking about in order to achieve those goals. It would be interesting to put all that together from your various interviews with people who have been influenced by his insights and experience.

Teiser: It would be interesting, yes. I don't think I have ever interviewed anyone specifically on that subject, so I'd have to sort of start afresh. Certainly his influence is mentioned frequently.

Winiarski: He was a unique combination. He provided, in his own soul, this extraordinary combination of science and poetry. That's what it takes in this kind of thing. He was uniquely and surpassingly, perhaps, gifted with this combination of those two aspects at a very high level.

Teiser: Yes, and I suppose his experience in Europe and here helped give him a perspective on the Napa Valley.

Winiarski: Yes, that few others would possess. I never worked for André, but Mike Grgich worked for him. The two Paris tasting prize holders--we both worked for Lee Stewart and Robert Mondavi, and we both had an association with André, another circumstantial combination that bears some reflection.

Teiser: It comes back to that community of interest that you mentioned. I think you and Mike Grgich have added greatly in your own selves, of course, to all that.

Winiarski: Well, it's a continuing thing, isn't it? We are nourished, and we go on to continue the nourishment. We enrich and we are enriched. There is a lot to do.

Changes in Grape Growing Considerations

Winiarski: Refinement is now taking place in the vineyard. Everyone talks about the new things that are happening in the vineyard, and they are rather extraordinary. They're far-reaching. Before, we were talking about winemaking and grape growing as agriculture. Well, yes and no. Agriculture in the strict sense, as the term "agri" implies, is a field crop; you don't concern yourself with individual plants. That's the province of horticulture--hortus, meaning garden, and it's in the garden setting that most of the strong developments have actually taken place.¹ When you begin to deal with plants on an individual level, you're dealing with something that's more appropriate to garden techniques. Field techniques, as they are applied when you plant corn, barley, rye, or wheat, are not applied to individuals. There you sow the whole field, and you're not concerned with individual plants anymore; you're concerned with the whole field of plants and the crop that comes from it.

That was the way our so-called "agricultural endeavor" with grapevines was before. We were mainly thinking about the vineyard as a field of plants, as I can see it, thinking about the way I learned, using the standard textbooks before, which I read all the time. True, we were pruning individual vines, but we were not thinking about the vines as leading to wine at the level that we have been talking about most recently--that moderation and restraint consideration, for example.

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Winiarski: We weren't thinking about particular vines leading to particular styles of wine. We were thinking about quality, no

¹This distinction was suggested to me by my perceptive friend George C. Ball, President and Chairman of the Board of Burpee Seed Co. For some time, he was also president of the American Horticultural Society.

question about that, but in a very generalized level. We didn't have very specific, stylistic criteria wherein to judge the objectives of what we were trying to do in our vineyards. I think all that has changed. We are now very much concerned with the individual vine and how to manage it, not to produce a crop of very generalized excellence but very specific, down to the stylistic considerations of what *that* vine and its grapes should produce by way of wine. So that is not treating vines as a field any more but treating them as though they were in a garden, as individuals.

That's what we're doing now with the SLV replanting program. That's the reason we're replanting, to get to this kind of consideration sooner rather than later. That's certainly what we have been doing since 1986 in our Fay vineyard. Even before that, thinking about purchasing that vineyard, the question was: what happened with those vines? Why did the quality of the fruit that they were producing decline? Why was it that Joe Heitz was making those wines before and then was not too keen on them? Something was happening in the vineyard. We knew that in the beginning it produced outstanding fruit. After fifteen or sixteen years, the quality of the fruit that it was producing had changed. Why couldn't they hold to those original quality parameters? Why was the style changing?

All those questions were in my mind, and we were thinking about that. When I went to Australia in 1986, we were in the final stages of our reflections. I had, I thought, formulated all the questions. I had already bought the Fay vineyard, actually. But before we began any work in that spring--that was the spring of the great floods--I was invited to Sydney by Len Evans to judge at the Sydney Wine Show as their international judge. The function I served there was (to go off the track for a minute) the same function as when we try to get someone from the outside to share in our tastings at our winery--to give someone with an outside perspective the ability to judge with people who are very used to their own wines. We arrange this so that we can get a kind of fresh perspective and fresh insight into the kinds of things that need to be considered.

I met there Danny Schuster, whose ideas about vineyard management and principles of growing answered my questions about the Fay vineyard. We bring him over a number of times a year, and we have worked together now for the last six years to develop the principles to apply to our own vineyard from his experience in New Zealand and Australia. He's done a great deal of profound study on what might be called the non-agrinomic way to

agricultural economics way to approach a vineyard, with a view to producing high-quality fruit. For example, to take what has now become an easy to understand and almost "classic" example, your vine spacing--how closely should your vines be spaced? The agricultural economics answer would be, "What's the size of your tractor?" If your tractor is five feet wide, then you should have a vineyard with rows at least wide enough to accommodate the tractor. It's not a consideration that has anything to do with wine quality. But maybe if you put your rows apart as far as they have to be for your widest tractor, you won't make good wine. That's the non-economic caveat. The fact that you don't want to buy a new tractor has nothing to do with wine quality. Maybe closer spacing, with a narrower tractor, might have something to do with wine quality. This is not to say that the economic considerations are irrelevant. On the contrary, they are very important but also secondary and subordinate.¹

Those kinds of decisions are of a different weight and a different bearing for what you should do in a vineyard--how high your canopy should be, how much fruit each vine should be allowed to bear, not how much it costs to plant a vineyard or that wider spacing is more economic than narrower spacing. What we should be thinking about is, "What is your objective for wine quality? What kind of style do you want these grapes to produce?" Maybe that should be the most important thing. That's the kind of thing we're thinking about now that we weren't thinking about in precisely those terms back in 1970.

Teiser: Have there been changes in availability of rootstock, too?

Winiarski: This whole thing about phylloxera has now forced us to rethink the alternatives. As a matter of fact, they call them now the "alternative" rootstocks, by which they mean alternative to AxR#1 and alternative to St. George. St. George, being completely rupestris in its origin--in other words, one of the native Americans--is immune to phylloxera. I'm not sure immune is the correct term. It tolerates; it does not succumb to phylloxera. AxR#1, having a vinifera parent in its origin, is susceptible to phylloxera.

So AxR#1 is out, and St. George is still in. But the question is whether St. George is the best rootstock for the

¹Cf. the discussion of the relationships between "way of life" and the "economically sustainable way of life" highlighted on p. [23] and adumbrated in earlier discussions when reflecting on the sustainability of the new career. WW

kind of farming, the kind of viticulture that I was talking about just a second ago, the kind of viticulture that has to do with the ultimate objective of wine quality. Maybe it's not, and I think it is not. It's resistant, but there are other resistant rootstocks which might serve our purpose better--for example, rootstocks which have a shorter vegetative cycle, which means, say, Cabernet ripens earlier because the vegetative part of the vine stops earlier, and the reproductive phase of the vine begins. The reproductive phase is the one that has to do with seeds and fruit. If we can get the vine to focus its attention on the reproduction, namely on the seeds and fruit and stop thinking about making leaves--if we can get the vine to stop "thinking" about making leaves earlier in the season--we might have better fruit. We might have fruit that we don't have to wait until the end of October to get ripe.

Teiser: Are there new varieties or variations of other varieties?

Winiarski: New to us. They've had European experience. There are different crosses and different types of rootstock which have been used in Europe and elsewhere more than they have been used in California. AxR#1 and St. George have really dominated the scene for a long time here.

Teiser: How about the grapes themselves?

Winiarski: The fruiting varieties? Well, people are talking about some of the Italian varieties now for novelty, because so much attention is given to Chardonnay and to Cabernet. I think Petit Verdot, that we are using, is one of the new varieties that has not been much used in the past.

Teiser: Have any of the varieties that you have been using been improved within themselves?

Winiarski: I can't say that they have, unless there's some clonal selection. To the extent that anybody has been doing that, there has been improvement. For example, we have twenty-two years experience now with our own clonal selection. We made this selection from two different sources. Essentially it all goes back to what is called the Oakville clone of Cabernet. In the twenty years, we have developed technique for judging the final suitability for picking of our different blocks at SLV. After we get to a certain sugar, we no longer rely on sugar tests. Rather, what we do is go through the field and taste the individual vines for the quality that we're looking for. We mark the vines that we like, and we do not mark the vines that we don't like. Over a period of years, if some of those

vines turn out fruit that we are not happy with for taste, they are eliminated from those which are marked.

In the beginning we had quite a few. After a number of years, the large number is now a smaller number of vines that consistently, year after year, produce the quality, the taste, that we're looking for near the time of picking. Those are the ones that we will propagate from for our next vineyard. We'll use those as scion wood to multiply in our next vineyard. Now, you might ask if that is an improvement of the variety. I think so.

Of course we're looking for disease resistance. If there is a sign of disease or virus in those vines, we don't use them. We're looking for a fair degree of crop per vine, so we don't mark vines that are not good bearers. Those are the first things: disease free, good-sized crop--not excessive, but good--and how they taste at the end of the season. If they taste good, that's the final consideration. Vines that don't satisfy all three of these requirements are left aside. We don't multiply from those vines. I don't know whether by this process we have a selection or a clone. Maybe there's no genetic difference between one and the other, but we know those vines always produce similar characteristics. They're scattered throughout the vineyard, so I don't think it's a soil consideration, and they're always producing better fruit.

Teiser: You say you don't have any phylloxera here, but you'll be planting resistant stock. Have you had Pierce's disease or any other problems?

Winiarski: Yes. This is a little problem that maybe you were aware of. The Pierce disease seems to be related to the vigor of the rootstock. St. George and AxR#1 did not show the results of Pierce disease as rapidly; they were able, it seems to me, to live around the fact that they had some infestation, some presence of the disease. It's like having a cold. St. George had this Pierce disease, and I'm sure there were vines that eventually succumbed, but we've got St. George in the vineyard that has lived with Pierce disease for twenty years, and it still produces a crop. It's not as strong, but there's still some crop out there.

Teiser: Do you know what the vector is?

Winiarski: Yes, it's a leafhopper which picks up a bacterium, which is then transferred into the grapevine.

Teiser: Nobody's been able to find a predator that kills it, I suppose?

Winiarski: No. An antagonistic bacterium might be the way to solve that. But there's not enough biological control within our capability yet. If one could implant in the vine an antagonistic bacterium, that would work--something like immunology. If we could find some way to do that, I think it would be an extraordinary manipulation of this disease and its vector.

Teiser: Are there other problems that are coming up that haven't been apparent before?

Winiarski: Yes, naturally. When you deal with a less vigorous plant, as some of these newer rootstocks are (which is the reason we are looking for them). The way of training and developing them in the beginning is much more critical. They don't have capacity to forgive your mistakes to the extent that St. George and AxR#1 did because of their vigor. That's why they were preferred, because they forgave all those mistakes and still performed wonderfully in their youth and their adolescence. If you didn't water them the way they should be watered, they didn't much care and got along without it, and they did all right and recovered. But some of these newer rootstocks require far more attention and will tolerate fewer mistakes on your part. So these are little problems that we are learning as we begin to use these less vigorous stocks--their greater sensitivity and their greater reliance on you to make fewer mistakes. We're learning that.

IV NAPA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVE 1968.

Teiser: What haven't we discussed?

Winiarski: The ag preserve--Napa County land use.

Teiser: Where do you stand on it?

Winiarski: You know, Ruth, in 1968, as I said about my beginning acquaintance with Chuck Carpy, we both, among others, were very interested in getting that land regulation at the county level established. That was a highly controversial, highly divisive issue at that time. It was first a twenty-acre lot split limitation as a means of preserving the agricultural potential of this central zone here in Napa County--the Napa Valley proper. Although now, technically, from a viticultural standpoint, almost the whole county is called the Napa Valley. It's not only the watershed, but Napa County is almost coextensive with Napa Valley; Napa Valley, Napa County--it's almost the same thing.

Teiser: What nomenclature is that, then?

Winiarski: That's the American viticultural area regulations [AVA].

Teiser: The appellation?

Winiarski: Yes. BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] is charged with establishing the boundaries of a viticultural area. They hear from various people, and there were quite a few very insistent voices when the viticultural area was being established who wanted to be included, because their grapes (for example from Wooden Valley) had always been used by the Napa Valley vintners. So there's very little land that's wasn't recognized by the BATF as being included in the viticultural area as having a Napa Valley character.

Now, that was just an aside, to talk about the viticultural appellation of the Napa Valley. To get back to

the protection of agricultural land, that has been done in many steps to safeguard agriculture. As I said, in 1968 the Board of Supervisors established the 20-acre lot size minimum in the Agricultural Preserve--roughly 30,000 acres on the valley floor, and in later years it was increased to a 40-acre minimum in the Ag Preserve and 40-160 acres in the rest of the county designated as Ag Watershed. (Before '68, it was a one-acre minimum in all those lands.)

Well, of course there were still ways to get around that, to create new commercial and residential areas on rural land. So in 1980 the voters passed an initiative, Measure A, limiting the growth of county housing to 1 percent a year. And in 1990 they passed another initiative, Measure J, saying that any change in zoning of county agricultural and agricultural watershed lands required a voter approval.

There was still the question, apart from the size of parcels, of what kinds of uses were compatible with agriculture. So in the early nineties the Board of Supervisors worked out the Winery Definition Ordinance and the Hillside Development Ordinance, two things that many people thought we needed to enable the county to prevent proliferation of uses which would undermine the ability of the ag preserve to sustain itself. If one began to use the land for purposes which were fundamentally subordinate to agriculture, eventually you could force the end of agriculture in this valley. This again, however, was a highly controversial, highly divisive issue. Eventually things that one could do at wineries in subordination to the fundamental thing that they were meant to do was extended somewhat, but it was defined for the first time: what a winery was, and therefore what it could do in conjunction with its primary job of crushing grapes and processing fruit was defined for the first time. That was something that I had something to do with also. I thought it was very necessary to accomplish these things if grape growing in this valley were to survive.

Teiser: That was a question of retail sales and that sort of thing?

Winiarski: Right, and all the other so-called marketing endeavors that took place in conjunction with the primary use of the winery--dinners, kitchens, entertainment of various kinds, and so on. People were thinking about having elephant tours through the vineyards--bringing in elephants and selling tours. That's a little bit of an exaggeration, but it was an actual proposal that came into the Napa Valley Vintners' Association.

Teiser: Where did you stand on it?

Winiarski: I was very strongly in support of the need for a certain amount of restraint, because without that it is clear to me that agriculture would eventually become secondary and that, for example, the valley could fill up with grape-processing operations whose grapes didn't even come from the valley. All of these pose very serious problems to the ongoing agricultural endeavor. This land is unique; it can't be duplicated any place else in the world, and it needs to be thought about. What is it that protects it?

On the other hand, people said that without the marketing endeavor the wineries can't survive; and if the wineries can't survive, then the vineyards can't survive. That point of view had to be made, it had to be listened to, and it had to be taken into account.

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Teiser: I think people kept holding up Carmel as an example of what might happen.

Winiarski: "The Carmelization of the Napa Valley," is that it? [laughs] Well, it's surely a possibility. The Napa Valley has a wonderful name, it has vast consumer acceptance. It sets a standard for so much of what the consumer thinks about the best California wines, and that, unfortunately, has a danger. It lends itself, therefore, to the danger of being exploited without any connection to reality. People talked about the danger of "zip-code" wineries; they would use a Napa Valley address and process out-of-county fruit in an activity which depleted the limited county resources of water, space, air, transportation access, and all of these things, and had nothing to do with the Napa Valley. That was surely something that we had to address.

Teiser: Are you fairly well protected now?

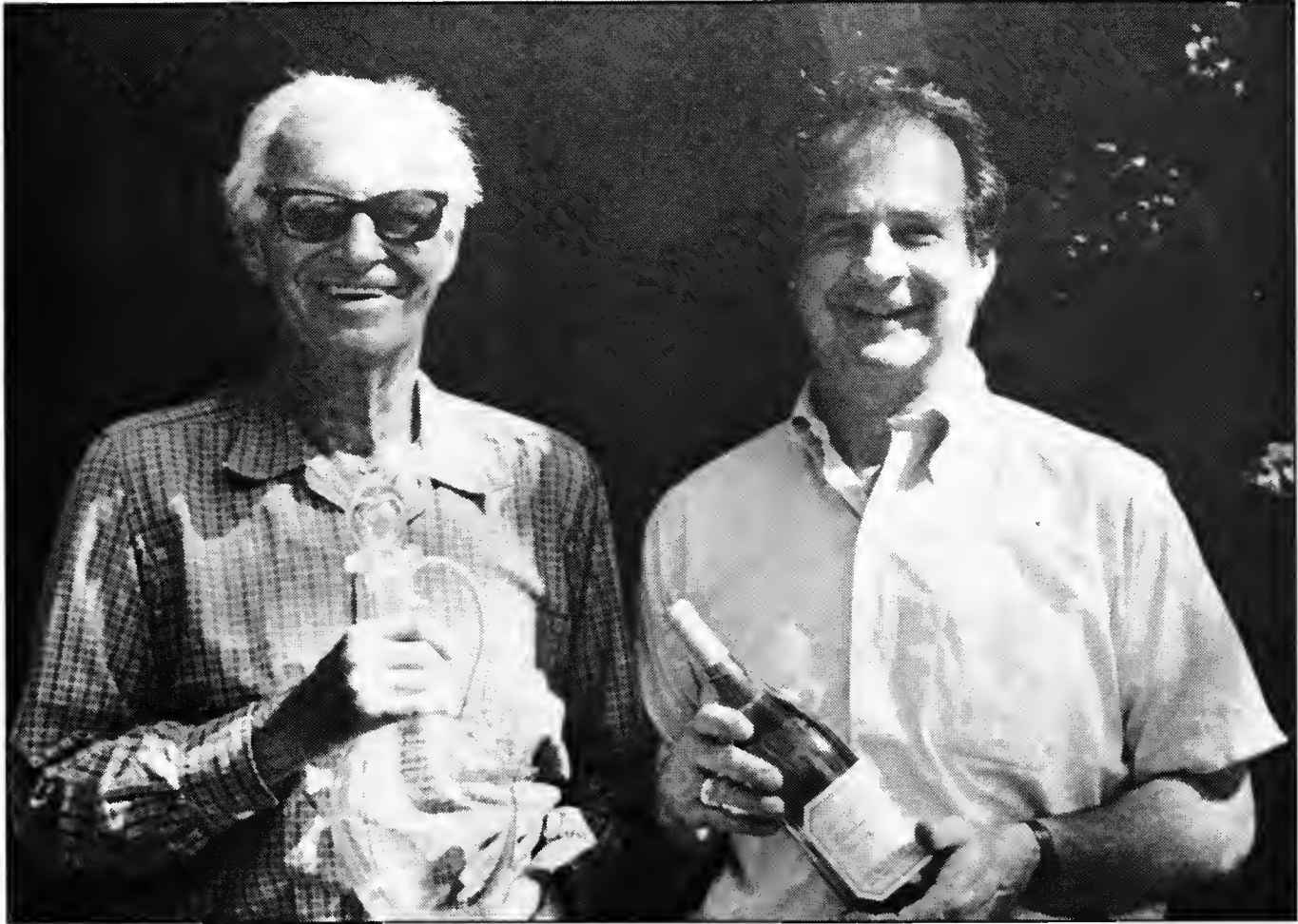
Winiarski: One could say that we defined the issue, and it's there for people to have another look at. If it's not enough, then maybe we have to do more. I don't hear anyone saying that it's too much. The case is similar to what we had when the first agricultural preserve ordinance was put into effect. Eventually we had to extend that. We came in with twenty acres, and eventually we went to forty acres as a minimum lot size. If there is a general sense that we have to revisit those issues in light of our experience as to how well it's doing, then we have laid the basis for it in the first effort.

Teiser: What about the hillside erosion? Has that been kept under control?

Winiarski: Again, there's very little you can do with land use that doesn't create a controversy. People rightly feel that the land they own is castle-like. Your rights to use land are very important, and the Constitution provides for that kind of property. The regulations have to be clearly for a public purpose, and they can't take it from you in the guise of using it for public purposes. All those issues are very present. I think there is a division of opinion of whether that has gone too far. Some people cannot develop the hillsides because it is too difficult, too expensive, and the erosion control is too demanding. On the other hand, if they don't control the erosion, the vineyards that they put in would only be there for a short time anyway. So maybe some of those things have to be resolved in the same way. You have to look to the long-term use of the land, and long-term use does not mean five or six years of excessive erosion which eventually makes the land not usable for anything as well as coming into a condition which made it detrimental to one's neighbors. For example, if the erosion causes your neighbor's land to end up damming your part of a stream or silting up everything downstream from the erosion.

All these issues were explored. Where we ended up is always a compromise. Some people are unhappy. The net result I think is constructive. That might take revisiting also. Look, if we didn't have an extraordinarily precious resource, the issues would be very simple. They could be solved by moving on. The little village that sat beside the San Francisco Bay in its first days--there were probably some people who were nostalgic because that little village was going to disappear, and it became a thriving metropolis, a commercial and industrial metropolis. I don't think it's the same situation here. We have something that's got to be used for what it is, or else it's lost. Its identity, its destiny is not to become a metropolis or a housing tract. Its best and highest use is to grow this quality fruit which represents this national treasure to such a large extent. This is a national treasure. If we lose it, it's gone, and we can't produce those grapes and those wines any more.

If all of that is valuable, and I think it is, then we have to think of preserving this in its identity as it exists. That takes, unfortunately, restraints on what all of us can do.



Warren Winiarski, right, receiving award from writer Harry Waugh for Stag's Leap Chardonnay, 1991.

V VITICULTURAL AREA DESIGNATIONS

Teiser: Does the designation of the viticultural areas help the preservation idea?

Winiarski: That's a very interesting question, to come at it from that perspective. In a way, it seems that it helps. You have official, governmental recognition of this land as a viticulture area. There is therefore with this recognition a public sensitivity or public acknowledgement of something important. Maybe the subdivisions of that viticultural area will have a similar value--because now we have Rutherford, we probably have Oakville, we have Howell Mountain, Stag's Leap District, and maybe we'll have a Yountville. At least public attention is focused on something, an official recognition.

It may be quite important, therefore, to be sure we get these viticultural areas as right as we can; namely they should be reflections as much as possible of the viticultural reality. If there's really a difference between the Cabernet grown here and the Cabernet grown there, maybe we should draw the line between the two and not extend it for the sake of the convenience of individuals. There's always somebody on the outside of a boundary who would like to be included, and that sometimes doesn't necessarily work to the benefit of the reality. The reality is maybe extended a bit too much, so you have these little boundary extensions that might dilute the viticultural truth.

Of course, having said that, the tendency to do that on a more political basis is always very strong. That's why I said "as much as possible." It may not in every case be possible to reflect those realities as truly as you would like them to be reflected.

I guess I have a sense that all of this has to be done in steps, and maybe at some future time we'll redraw some of the lines as we get more sophisticated, as we get more consumer interest in doing that. There might be some greater demand for

that. The French system was not conceived overnight. There were at least three major layers of regulation which changed the former ones, extended, and refined and so on. Sometimes when I'm on marketing trips it's difficult to make people understand the Napa Valley--that Sonoma, for instance, is not part of the Napa Valley or vice versa. That might be the level of distinctiveness that people can handle at this time. Maybe these finer subdivisions get additional refinement only later. When you have one horizon, you are familiar with it, and then you go to smaller horizons within the larger one. That might take a little more time and interest and experience.

Teiser: There was an effort being made to have a viticultural designation called San Francisco. I think it was made for marketing purposes, despite the fact that San Francisco never grew any appreciable number of grapes; but it did store tremendous amounts of wine at one time. That seems to me a very strange use of the concept.

Winiarski: I'm sure that's not the way it was presented by the proponents. They didn't say it was marketing; they said it was viticultural primarily. Well, they have the burden of proof: what's the viticultural evidence for the distinctiveness? I think the BATF's mandate is fairly clear along those lines: what's the good evidence for viticultural distinctiveness?

Where is that project right now?

Teiser: I don't know.

Winiarski: I forget who proposed it, but I remember talk about it some time ago, and then I've never heard anything about it since.

Well, the "burden of proof" is I think a beneficial part of the BATF's mandate in looking at these kinds of proposals.

VI OUTLOOK

Teiser: The last question on my outline was about changes in the California wine industry since 1964 in your judgment and observation, and what the outlook is.

Winiarski: I think we've covered some major ones since 1964--the agricultural, the winemaking style, the regional and classic aspirations--as they were tangent on our own activities. The outlook now is whether some of these aspirations will succeed in being embodied, whether the competition that has developed over the last years gives us still the opportunity--doesn't make us so competitive that we lose sight of our long-range goals because of the short-range pressures. I think that would be unfortunate. I think it's important to keep those long-term objectives. Ultimately, all we have is our distinctiveness and our quality. If we put aside those objectives or lose the ability to achieve them because, for example, of competition--because we're selling our wines under the prices that we should, and the economic resource is not there to support the pursuit of excellence--that would be unfortunate. Maybe there would be an ongoing shift of winery capacity from weaker hands to stronger hands. By stronger I mean the economic. That surely has to be there. The long-term objectives can't be accomplished without a certain amount of resource to do that. That could be a problem in the present situation.

Teiser: One of the problems connected with that is the growth of large organizations which take over small wineries. They seem sometimes to be ruthless about not maintaining quality standards. It's frequently said that when a large winery buys a small winery, its quality will go down, and I suppose it often happens. Are there enough small ones coming up to fill that loss over the long haul?

Winiarski: I can easily see considerations where a small winery could not continue to do what they set out to do because of competitive pressures and because it lacks economic resources. It's possible also that a larger winery not only has the resources

but the will to achieve the quality goals that a smaller winery for one reason or another is no longer able to achieve.

So maybe the thing to be concerned about in reality is not the size but the will and the application. In other words, in principle, there's no reason why a larger winery couldn't organize itself to achieve the goals of smallness, namely complete dedication to quality. The temptation as a practical matter is probably strong not to do that. But maybe the division between large and small is more accidental, and the real thing is the distinction in the will to achieve quality, the aspiration to do that.

I can see small wineries not being able to achieve those aspirations by not having the resources, by not having the talent, and not generating the continuity of ability. That's certainly possible also. I can see a larger winery organizing itself to achieve the goals that normally are associated with smallness. If you can take that normal association of quality--namely dedication, preserving the distinctive, not treating wine as a commodity--then in principle you could do that at a larger scale. So the real thing is the quality versus commodity distinction: what are you striving to achieve with this organization?

In other words, the larger--I'm not sure about the largest, because at some point the goals have to shift simply with the size; they become different. I think you have to look at what it is devoted to. Let's say a larger winery, instead of having one fifty-ton-an-hour crusher, had ten five-ton-an-hour crushers. If the way the grapes were crushed made a big difference to preserving, enhancing, capturing the quality, it could be done. They could have a lot of small gondolas in the field. They wouldn't necessarily have to treat grapes as so many tons, not thinking about the fruit but thinking about how many tons. In principle, it's not impossible. Therefore you could say that if they had the resources they could do what a small winery is normally believed to be able to do simply because its scale is at a level where the human-scale and quality-detail levels predominate and not where the mass aspect comes into play. As I said, in principle it's not impossible, but in practice--.

Teiser: Thank you very much. We have covered a tremendous lot of information, and I have enjoyed listening to you.

Transcribed by Judy Smith

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